“The decline of male enrollment in higher education: Implications for labour market productivity in Western Countries”

Capstone Project

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Submission date / 04/07/2025

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

National College of Ireland

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Title of Thesis: "The decline of male enrollment in Higher education: Implications for labour market productivity in Western Countries"

Thesis supervisor: Robert McDonald

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1. Abstract

At its essence, this dissertation investigates the implications of male underrepresentation in higher education enrollment on labour market productivity and economic equity in Western countries. Acting as an anchor, the research question that guided this study was as follows, “What are the implications of male underrepresentation in higher education enrollment for labour market productivity in Western countries?” The central hypothesis clearly posits in this study that the declining male enrollment in higher education negatively impacts labor market productivity and exacerbates economic inequities. This concern emerges from robust empirical data showing a consistent gender gap reversal in tertiary education, where females now outnumber males in most developed Western nations (Buchmann & DiPrete, 2006; Vincent-Lancrin, 2008).With an emphasis placed and grounded broader context of labor market dynamics and educational attainment, considering how socio-cultural factors and evolving economic demands contribute to male disengagement.

Existing literature highlights the multi-dimensional nature of this issue, linking it to shifts in social expectations, educational systems, and labor market requirements (Autor & Wasserman, 2013; Reeves, 2022). Notably, the research draws from quantitative data, such as graduation trends in Ireland and the United States (Central Statistics Office, 2024); National Center for Education Statistics, 2021), to illustrate the extent of gender disparities. In order to complement secondary data, an original survey was administered via LinkedIn and Outlook targeting professionals across Western countries. The surveywas designed to gather demographic data and attitudinal responses on male underrepresentation in higher education and its perceived effects on workforce productivity and economic equity. Employing Likert-scale questions and qualitative responses, this mixed-method approach enriches the analysis by capturing contemporary perspectives from diverse sectors. By critically examining these factors, the dissertation aims to contribute to academic discourse and inform policy interventions addressing gender imbalances in education and labor markets. Ultimately, this research seeks to

highlight pathways to foster inclusive educational environments that support balanced gender participation, enhancing economic productivity and equity in the evolving global economy.

2 Introduction

2.1 Background and Context

The phenomenon of male underrepresentation in higher education has become increasingly more prevelant across many Western countries over the last three decades. Historically, tertiary education was largely male dominated. However, in regards to recent trends it indicates a reversal, noteably with women now constituting the majority of university students in many developed nations (Buchmann & DiPrete, 2006; Autor & Wasserman, 2013). This gender shift has had significant socio-economic implications, demonstrated by educational attainment remainng a critical determinant of labor market outcomes and economic productivity (Goldin & Katz, 2008). The decline in male participation in higher education raises important questions about the future composition and productivity of the workforce, and the broader ramifications for economic equity and social cohesion.

The growing gender disparity is evidenced by quantitative data such as those from the Central Statistics Office (2024), which shows that in Ireland, female graduates consistently make up over 54% of total graduates between 2010 and 2019, with male graduate numbers stagnating in contrast. Similarly, in the United States, women have earned approximately 57% of awarded degrees since 2020 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). These trends are mirrored across European Union member states (European Commission, 2023), underscoring the transnational nature of this issue.

2.2 Critical Evaluation of Existing Literature

Scholars attribute this male disengagement from higher education to a complex interplay of cultural, social, and institutional factors. Buchmann and Yavorsky (2010) argue that the issue transcends mere educational policy and touches on deeper cultural shifts in gender expectations, where traditional notions of masculinity and success may conflict with academic achievement. DiPrete (2012) highlights that boys' lower academic engagement may stem from differences in maturity and socialization patterns, exacerbated by schooling environments that may be better aligned with girls' learning styles (Connell, 2000).

While the advancement of women in education represents a commendable correction of historical inequalities (Vincent-Lancrin, 2008), it inadvertently spotlights the relative decline of male engagement and the associated risks. Reeves (2022) emphasizes the labor market consequences, noting a 7 percentage point drop in male labor force participation in the United

States over the last century, signaling not only educational disengagement but broader social withdrawal. This disengagement has been linked to rising underemployment and disability claims among young men, raising concerns about their economic integration and well-being (Burn-Murdoch, 2024).

However, existing research often focuses narrowly on either educational or labor market dimensions without adequately integrating the two or considering broader societal impacts. Moreover, quantitative analyses, while illustrative of trends, lack insight into individual attitudes and perceptions that may influence male participation and labor market dynamics.

2.3 Rationale for the Study

This dissertation seeks to address this gap by adopting a multidisciplinary approach that combines secondary data analysis with primary empirical research. The rationale is grounded in the urgent need to understand not only the statistical trends but also the lived experiences and perceptions related to male underrepresentation in higher education and its implications for labor market productivity and economic equity.

The motivation for this research stems from observing the potential long-term consequences of continued male disengagement. As technology-driven economies increasingly demand higher skills and qualifications (OECD, 2021), the persistent gender gap threatens to exacerbate skill shortages and economic inefficiencies. Low-skilled sectors, traditionally dominated by men, are particularly vulnerable to automation, further disadvantaging men who lack higher education credentials (Autor & Dorn, 2013). This dynamic could deepen existing income disparities and reduce overall economic competitiveness.

By investigating these issues through a robust research design—including a targeted survey capturing diverse professional perspectives—this study aims to illuminate how male educational disengagement translates into labor market challenges and economic inequities. The inclusion of qualitative responses offers nuanced insights beyond what quantitative data alone can provide.

2.4 Research Question and Hypothesis

Guided by the central question, *"What are the implications of male underrepresentation in higher education enrollment for labor market productivity in Western countries?"* this research hypothesises that the declining male enrollment has a substantial detrimental effect on workforce productivity and worsens economic equity. This hypothesis is supported by the convergence of evidence from educational statistics, labor market trends, and socio-cultural analyses.

This inquiry is critical given the policy implications. Understanding these dynamics is essential to designing interventions that promote balanced gender participation, support male educational attainment, and ultimately sustain a productive and equitable labor market.

2.5 Overview of Methodology

This dissertation employs a mixed method approach combining secondary data analysis with primary empirical research to comprehensively examine the implications of male underrepresentation in higher education on labor market productivity and economic equity.

Firstly, secondary quantitate data from official government sources such as the Central Statistics Office (2024) and the National Center for Education Statistics (2021) provide a robust foundation to identify and analyse long-term trends in gender enrollment and graduation rates across Western countries. This data enables a macro-level understanding of the scope and scale of male underrepresentation.

Complementing this, an original online survey using Google forms was conducted to capture contemporary perceptions and attitudes among professionals across various Western countries. The survey was distributed via LinkedIn and outlook over a four-week period from 14/06/2025 until 28/06/2025 . A total of 34 respondents participated, representing diverse sectors including finance, education, technology, and healthcare. The sample targeted working professionals aged 25 to 55 to ensure respondents have relevant labor market experience.

The survey combined quantitative Linkert cale scale assessing respondents' views on the impact of male underrepresentation on labor productivity and economic equity, with open ended qualititave queations. **I**nviting reflections on potential causes and long-term consequences. This approach allows for triangulation of data, blending statistical trends with nuanced insights from lived experiences and expert opinions.Inviting reflections on potential causes and lon

Data from the Likert-scale questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis to identify patterns and associations. Qualitative responses were thematically coded to extract common themes related to socio-cultural and economic impacts.

Ethical approval was secured from National College of Ireland, and all participants provided informed consent. The anonymity of respondents was preserved to encourage candid responses. While the use of LinkedIn facilitated access to a broad professional audience, it is acknowledged that self-selection bias and demographic limitations may affect the generalizability of findings.

Overall, this mixed-methods design strengthens the study by integrating quantitative trend analysis with qualitative depth, offering a comprehensive understanding of how male educational disengagement translates into labor market and economic challenges.

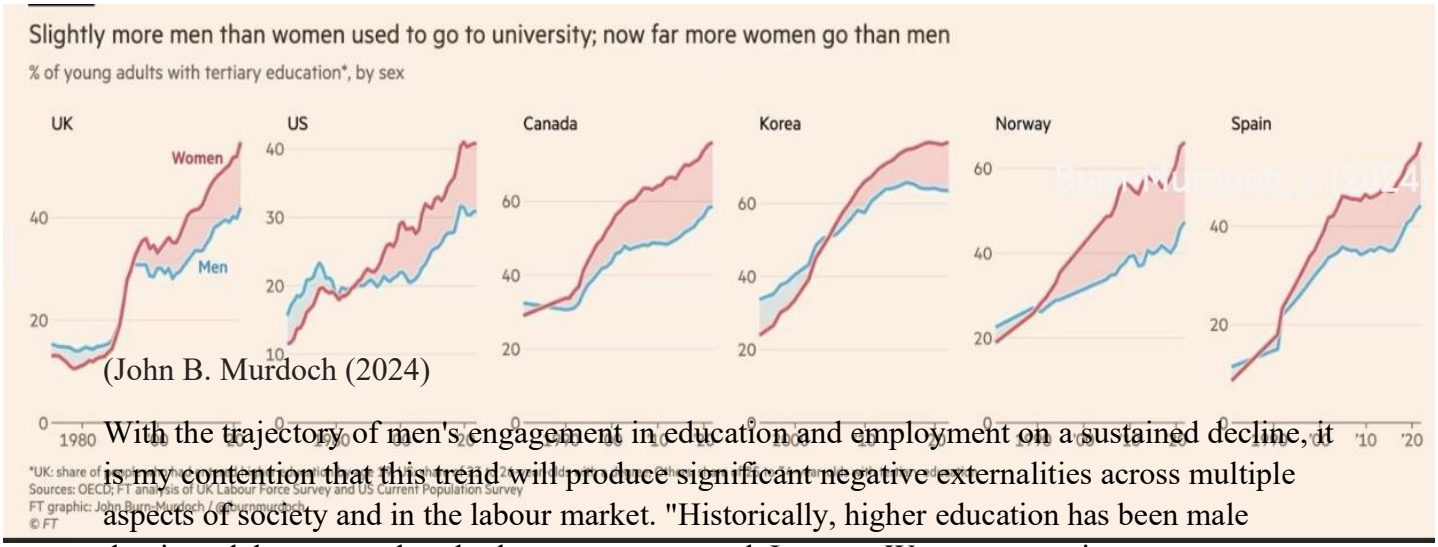
3.0 Literature Review

3.1 Introduction to the Field

There is irrefutable documentation that has increased over the past three decades across Western nations that shows the phenomenon of male underrepresentation has a measurable trajectory of increasing. This Literature review critically evaluates and synthesis's key material and empirical findings from sources such as peer-reviewed journals, institutional reports, scientific experiments seen in Universe 25 conducted by John Calhoun and finally policy analyses. In addition, it critically evaluates the dominant theoretical frameworks used to explore gendered educational trends and their ramifications and implications on Western economies, shining a light on converging and conflicting viewpoints. Existing Knowledge in this section specifically to the Irish context and by using a mixed- method approach also positions the present study within the broader scholarly conversation that builds on and extends prior methodologies.

3.2 Male Disengagement from Higher Education and the Labour Market: A Growing Societal Risk

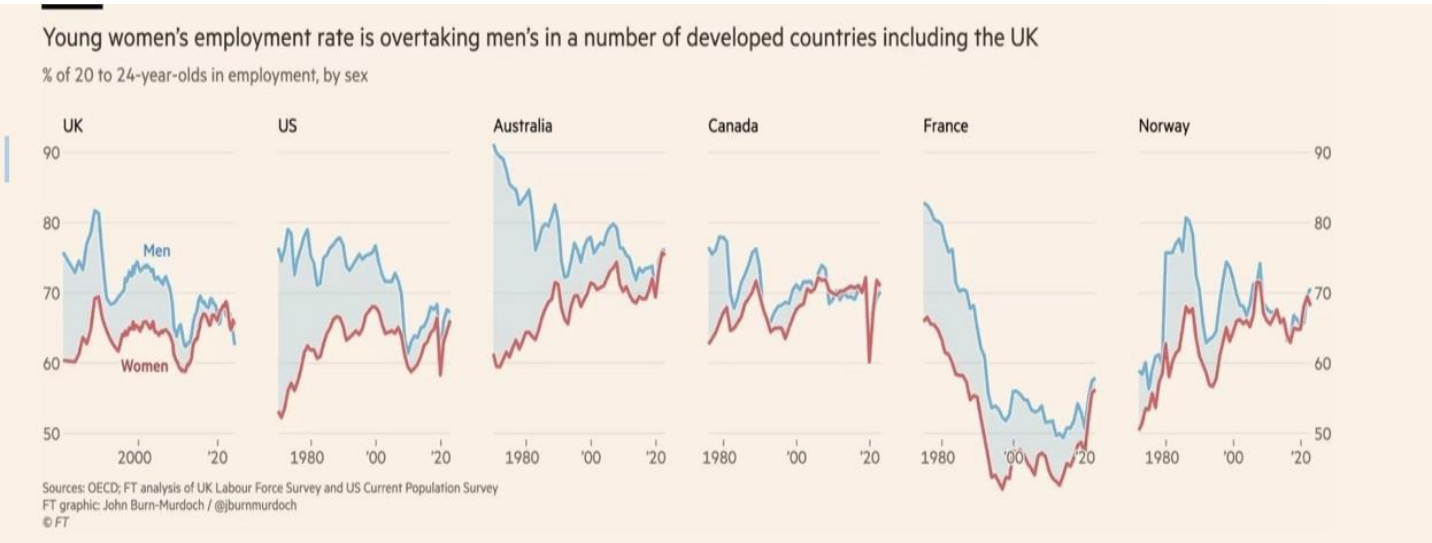
There is a concerning phenomenon currently taking place predominantly in the western world in relation to the attendance of the male cohort matriculating in higher level education, and their disengagement of the labor force. The shift is no longer speculative but backed by compelling quantitative and longitudal evidence. Taking the position that it is counterproductive for the labour market in the workplace and will ultimately unfold in the decades to come. According to Murdoch it may be closer than we think “non-graduate men, who have gone from earning 57 per cent more than non-graduate women in 1991, to 10 per cent less in 2022.” Burn-Murdoch, J. (2024). This is an exceptionally large variance in such as short span of time of just 31 years.



(John B. Murdoch (2024)

With the trajectory of men's engagement in education and employment on a sustained decline, it is my contention that this trend will produce significant negative externalities across multiple aspects of society and in the labour market. "Historically, higher education has been male dominated, but recent decades have seen a reversal. In many Western countries, women now earn a higher proportion of bachelor's, master's, and even doctoral degrees compared to men (Autor & Wasserman, 2013)”. It is undeniable now that in most developed countries women are

out perfuming men as I reference the Financial Times via graph depicting men attending university programmes as well as securing employment is plummeting drastically at a rate in the western world.



(John B. Murdoch (2024)

3.3 Academic Perspectives on Gendered Educational Disparities

3.3.1 Structural Reform Versus Cultural Reframing: Contrasting Views on Male Underperformance

There is a significant divergence between scholars in their interpretations of the potential reasons behind the phenomenon of male underrepresentation in higher education. One prominent discourse that focuses on the reforming of educational systems to accommodate boys learning styles (Connell,2000). For instance, leading experts advocate for pedagogical reforms, proposing that traditional academic structures may unintentionally favor female cognitive and behavioral development.

In contrast, Claudia Buchmann from Ohio State University shares the stance that structural reforms may address symptoms as opposed to the root causes. It is their perspective that male disengagement is symptomatic of the repercussions of cultural and ideological shifts regarding gender and educational values. They share the view that societal expectations around masculinity, effort, and academic engagement have shifted. Placing boys at a cultural disadvantage. Rather than simply redesigning classrooms, (Buchmann,2010) emphasizes the need for a cultural interrogation of how boys are socialized in relation to education.

3.3.2 Gendered Socialisation and Maturity Gaps in Educational Engagement

Thomas A. DiPrete, a leading sociologist from Columbia University, brings a developmental and sociocultural lens to the topic. His findings highlight the impact of gendered socialisation regarding academic engagement. It is important to note that boys in particular frequently enter and progress through the academic system with noticeable lower levels of behavioral and emotional regulation in contrast to girls (DiPrete & Buchmann, 2013). These disparities are partly due to neurological and psychosocial differences in developmental maturity, which can result in reduced engagement in academic settings, delayed educational ambition, and lowered self-awareness to academic self-concept.

This perspective shows that interventions must account for both educational environments and societal stances on gender, discipline, and expectations, as opposed to solely concentrating narrowly on curriculum design.

3.3.3 Economic Implications of Educational Disengagement

Firstly, steering focus away from the classroom, the long-term economic ramifications and consequences of male underperformance in education are alarmingly increasing. Richard Reeves (2022) of the University of Oxford, alongside David Autor of MIT, concur that the educational disengagement of men is reverberating into the labour market. Reeves highlighting that male labour force participation in the United States has fallen by a worryingly seven percentage points over the course of the last century – from 96% to 89% - these figures imply a structural consequence that are beyond that of academic failure. Author sheds light on the fact that the labour market demands for high skilled labour is mismatched to that of the skills acquired of male students or the skills failed to be acquired though the current educational systems.

Macroeconomic inefficiencies are portrayed here, importantly distinguished from and not only displayed as individual opportunity loss. In an era where technological innovation, especially the rise of artificial intelligence, is redefining the nature of work, education is no longer optional but a fundamental prerequisite for economic stability and individual social mobility. Futhermore, the underrepresentation of men from these pathways threatens productivity, innovation and social cohesion.

3.3.4 The Gender Flip: Shifting Trends in Higher Education

Supported by empirical data scholars now have coined the term “gender flip” in educational attainment. Vincent-Lancrin (2008) documents a significant reversal in historical patterns of university attendance, with females now consistently outnumbering males in matriculation and degree completion across most OECD countries. These patterns are corroborated by more recent longitudinal analyses from DiPrete and Buchmann (2013).

who identify a convergence of multiple factors—including shifting cultural norms, female-centric educational policies, and labour market evolution—as key contributors to this reversal.

While this represents a historic success for gender equity in education, it simultaneously raises concerns about the growing educational and economic marginalisation of young men. The challenge, therefore, lies not in reversing this progress but in ensuring that equity efforts become more inclusive—addressing the needs of underperforming male cohorts without undermining advances made by women.

3.4 Quantitative data on graduate trends In Ireland

Table 5.1: Breakdown of Graduates by Analysis Parameter

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total Number of Graduates	34,570	34,470	35,110	36,150	36,610	35,200	37,570	38,740	40,830	42,310
Gender										
Female	19,310	19,060	19,250	19,700	19,730	18,920	20,560	21,210	22,380	23,060
%	55.9%	55.3%	54.8%	54.5%	53.9%	53.8%	54.7%	54.7%	54.8%	54.5%
Male	15,270	15,410	15,860	16,450	16,870	16,290	17,010	17,530	18,450	19,230
%	44.2%	44.7%	45.2%	45.5%	46.1%	46.3%	45.3%	45.3%	45.2%	45.5%
Other Gender	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	20
%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

(C.S.O, 2024)

According to quantitative data from the Central Statistics Office (2024) in Ireland, it reveals a persistent gender imbalance in Higher education, female graduates have consistently represented around 54% - 56% of the total number of graduates each year from 2010 to 2019. Interestinlgy, the number of graduates who were female increased from 19,310 from year one to 23,060 in year 10. While in 2010 44.2% of graduates who were male subsequently in 2019 remained relatively static, increasingly marginally from 44.2% to 45.5% over the same period.

This stagnation in male participation raises critical concerns despite expanded access to higher education. These critical concerns shaped by structural, social and cultural barriers specific to male engagement.

While on enrollment trends, statistical and quantitative data depicts the extent of the gender gap matriculating in higher education. For example, in the United States another western country 57% of awarded degrees were women 2020 a statistic mirrored in many other countries (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). Moreover, this observation that in nearly all member states across the European Union as according to the European commission female enrollment outpaces male enrollment in nearly all member states.

3.5 Universe 25 and Societal Parallels: Interpreting Male Disengagement Through Calhoun's Behavioural Sink

John Calhoun's Universe 25 experiment (Calhoun, 1962:1973) is a viable although limited metaphor for humans for understanding social disengagement. Originally the experiment was studying density and social collapse among rodents. While it may not be directly transferable to human society it offers an illuminating, hypothetical lens through which explore and examines the complex issue of male disengagement in higher education and the labour market. The experiment was conducted in the 1960s and 70s, whereby placing a population of mice in a so called "utopia" which offered abundance of food, water and shelter, but space and social structure were constrained to a confined space. Throughout the course of the experiment the rodent population began to show disturbing patterns, after the initial population boom came stagnation, followed by catastrophic collapse, what was labelled by Calhoun as the " behavioral sink" (Calhoun,1973")

In essence, the "behavioural sink" phase fundamentally demonstrated a breakdown of social roles, reproductive collapse, heightened aggression and the emergence of isolated subgroups. These subgroups were coined as the "beautiful ones" in the experiment. Essentially this group of the mice population withdrew from societal interactions within the group. They were observed to indulge in hedonistic rituals such as grooming and self-maintenance. Although this experiment was conducted regarding animal behaviour, it can be clearly depicted that there are suggestive parallels to male disengagement trends observable in modern western economies and societies.

Potentially creating a viable correlation that we see today in these Western economies and societies. As there is a growing number of young men appear to be retreating from traditional societal pathways, such as matriculation into universities and engaging in full time employment. The substitution of participating in society taking the form as digital escapism, including online forums, virtual environments and excessive video gaming, Behaviours that are synomous with the self-isolating tendencies seen in Calhoun's "beautiful ones". From the point of view from a sociological perspective, such withdrawal may indicate a broader disillusionment with societal misalignment between male identity constructs and contemporary education /workforce systems.

However, It is paramount that critical awareness stays at the forefront of this compelling metaphor due to its limitations. It is undeniable that mice do not possess the cognitive, emotional and cultural complexity of humans. The clear limitations seen in experiment Universe 25 did not account for policy interventions, individual agency, or economic structures. All of which play a fundamental role that is integral to human development and social systems. Moreover, Calhoun's study may symbolically highlight the dangers of societal misalignment, it cannot be used as a predictive model without caution (Ramsden,2020)

In spite of its limitations, Universe 25 creates an insightful and useful reflection on the implications are for the dissolvement of societal structures, that can lead to devastating ramifications. If male participation in higher education continues to decline — a trend statistically documented in Ireland and other Western contexts (CSO, 2024; OECD, 2023) — this may lead to longer-term socioeconomic imbalances. These could manifest as reduced earning potential, heightened dependency rates, and increased alienation among young men.

Frankly, it is not enough to expand access to education; it deserves a deeper interrogation and deep understanding of how educational environments, labour market pathways, and masculine norms interact. Policy must be investigated and must realign with the market needs; it is additionally essential that curricula become more inclusive and catered for various learning styles.

In conclusion, Calhoun's behavioral sink should not be misconstrued for a direct social model; it may serve as a potent allegory for the implications of systemic conditions that foster withdrawal, stagnation and identity disintegration. Furthermore, understanding these patterns critically and intervening early is vital to maintain social cohesion and economic harmony.

3.6 Masculinity, Identity, and Higher Education Participation

Contemporary research has broadened our understanding of how masculinity and social identity influence male engagement in higher education. Burke (2009) utilised qualitative interviews with men in the UK, revealing that masculine subjectivities—such as 'respectability', 'laziness', and peer pressure—significantly shape "aspirations and experiences" in tertiary-level study (Burke, 2009, p. 85). Her work demonstrates participation policies, while designed to 'widen participation', can inadvertently alienate men who see themselves as incongruent with the constructed 'ideal student'. This supports the view, first advanced by Connell (2000), that male disengagement often stems from perceived cultural misalignment with academic norms.

Complementing this, research from Project MALES in Texas shows that male students of colour often experience unique challenges shaped by intersecting identities and cultural expectations (Huerta et al., 2021). Their PsychoSocioCultural (PSC) framework emphasises how factors at individual, cultural, and institutional levels jointly affect access and persistence. This multi-layered perspective highlights a critical oversight in much existing research: male

underrepresentation cannot be understood without addressing the specific experiences of subgroups such as men of colour.

3.7 Global Trends, Aspirations, and the COVID19 Legacy

A World Bank report (2021) on male educational underachievement provides compelling global data: in over 76% of countries, men enroll less in tertiary education than women (World Bank, 2023). It also highlights how boys' lower aspirations contribute significantly. Lundberg (2025) supports this, stating that boys today are "simply less interested in attending college than girls" (Lundberg, 2025). These findings complement your research context in Western countries but importantly extend it by introducing aspiration as a central concept—something only rarely addressed in Western-based literature.

Crucially, the World Bank report suggests that if boys had equal educational attainment with girls, longterm productivity in some regions could increase by as much as 13.9%—highlighting a powerful economic argument for addressing male underrepresentation (World Bank, 2023). This aligns with human capital theory (Becker, 1993) and reinforces hypotheses 1 and 3 of this dissertation.

3.8 Structural Biases: Grading, Feedback, and Classroom Contexts

Recent international studies have shed light on systemic factors disadvantaging boys, such as grading biases. For instance, research across multiple OECD countries shows that boys receive grades lower than girls despite equivalent performance—suggesting a pervasive evaluative bias (Vincent-Lancrin, 2008; Mullola et al., 2011). This grading gap has profound implications: it may reduce male confidence, lower university enrolment, and exacerbate perceptions that academic achievement is harder for boys.

Relatedly, interventions focusing on student self-efficacy and belonging, such as activelearning pedagogies in STEM, have reduced gender gaps in achievement (Karim, Maries & Singh, 2025). These findings suggest that institutional reform—particularly classroom-based strategies—could support male engagement without compromising standards for female students.

3.9 Intersectional and Ethnic Dimensions of Male Disadvantage

Studies focused on men of colour illustrate how intersectionality amplifies educational barriers. Saenz et al. (2013) identify machismo and fear of appearing subordinate as key factors that reduce help-seeking behaviours among Latino men in education settings. Similarly, Latina/x male students navigate complex cultural identities that can conflict with institutional norms (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004). These layered challenges highlight that male underrepresentation is not monolithic and must be studied through nuanced lenses.

In the U.S., retention programmes targeting men of colour have employed culturally responsive strategies to improve persistence—though questions remain about their scalability outside elite institutions (Huerta et al., 2021). This line of enquiry underscores hypothesis 4: policy responses must be tailored to specific subgroups, rather than applied universally.

3.10 Theoretical Extensions: Toxic Masculinity and Role Congruity

Gender scholarship has also evolved to include concepts like 'toxic masculinity' and 'role congruity'. The American Psychological Association (APA, 2022) links traditional masculine norms—such as stoicism, self-reliance, and dominance—to reduced academic and mental health engagement among men. Similarly, *role congruity theory* (Eagly & Diekman, 2005) suggests that men may resist entry into occupations (like education) perceived as crossing into feminine norms—further reinforcing the idea that masculinity expectations shape institutional engagement.

Applying these frameworks to male educational underrepresentation suggests that guideline reforms must engage with cultural norms directly. Simply encouraging more male participation without addressing underlying identity scripts may be insufficient.

3.11 Institutional Strategies and Interventions

While the evidence for male-targeted interventions is emerging, some promising models exist. Grand Valley State University (GVSU) has implemented community-based programmes to foster male belonging early in their academic journey (GVSU, 2021). Such interventions underscore the importance of *social identity affirmation* as a mechanism to retain male students in HE.

Beyond that, active learning and belonging interventions have been shown to reduce gender-based academic disparity (Karim et al., 2025). However, these interventions are often generic and not specifically tailored to male sociocultural needs. This suggests a gap: despite strong theoretical backing, few policies take an explicitly gendered approach that centres both identity and academic belonging for male learners.

4.0 Research Question and Hypotheses

4.1 Background and Problem Statement

Over the course of the last 30 years, a profound shift has occurred within the gender composition of matriculation across Western nations, with women now consistently outpacing men in enrollment and degree attainment across undergraduate and postgraduate levels. (Vincent-Lancrin, 2008; DiPrete & Buchmann, 2013; OECD, 2023). While the success of women is to be celebrated and significant progress in gender equality, it has simultaneously raised concerns regarding the growing educational and economic marginalisation of young men.

In Ireland for instance, as stated previously from the data of the Central Statistics Office depicts that young men have consistently stagnated in higher education participation, despite increasing the access to the institutions by implementing institutional support structures.

As the nature of work in the 21st century

4.2 Research Question

What are the implications of male underrepresentation in higher education enrollment for labour market productivity in Western countries?

4.3 Research Objectives

1. *To analyse and explore historical and contemporary trends i*n male enrollment and graduation rates across higher education systems in Western , with a particular emphasis on Ireland as a case study.

2. To identify and critically evaluate contributing factors to male disengagement from higher education, including sociocultural, psychological, and institutional variables.

3. To assess the economic implications of male underrepresentation in higher education, particularly in relation to labour market productivity, participation rates, and skill mismatches.

4. To explore policy responses and reform efforts that address the educational and economic marginalisation of men without reversing the gains made in female participation.

5. To contribute to the academic and policy discourse by providing recommendations for inclusive educational frameworks that accommodate diverse learning styles and address gendered patterns of disengagement.

4.4 Hypotheses

Grounded in existing literature and supported by quantitative trends and theoretical frameworks, the following hypotheses guide this study:

1. H1: Male underrepresentation in higher education is significantly associated with lower rates of labour market participation among men in Western countries.
2. Supported by Autor & Wasserman (2013), Reeves (2022), and CSO (2024).

3. H2: Educational disengagement among men is influenced more by sociocultural and identity-based factors than solely structural or institutional factors.

4. Buchmann (2010) and Connell (2000) suggest that male underperformance is shaped by cultural constructions of masculinity and educational norms.

5. H3: Regions or countries with the widest gender gaps in higher education enrollment will demonstrate corresponding disparities in economic productivity or male earnings potential.

6. Empirical evidence from Burn-Murdoch (2024) and OECD (2023) supports a correlation between educational attainment and economic output.

7. H4: Current educational policy frameworks insufficiently address the specific learning needs, motivational factors, and identity issues contributing to male underachievement.
8. Based on critiques from DiPrete & Buchmann (2013) and recent policy reviews (Vincent-Lancrin, 2008).

5.0 Methodology

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research design and methodology used to explore the central question of the dissertation:

"What are the implications of male underrepresentation in higher education enrollment for labour market productivity in Western countries?"

The study is guided by a set of hypotheses grounded in existing theoretical and empirical literature. Of which among these is the proposition that declining male participation in higher education significantly contributes to lower productivity in the labour force and exacerbates broader key economic disparities. In order to investigate this hypothesis, the chapter outlines the research paradigm, the justification for using a mixed-methods approach, as well as the details of the data collection, analysis, and ethical procedures undertaken.

5.3 Research Paradigm

It was paramount that this research adopts a mixed methods framework drawing from both the positivist and interpretivist paradigms. I t can be clearly depicted that positivism underpins the empirical core of the study, which yhen uses measurable variables such as gendered enrollment rates, Likert-scale responses, and statistical trends. These are used to test hypotheses, identify correlations, and provide generalisable insights (Bryman, 2016). Aligning with the tradition of deductive inquiry, to which a theory-driven hypothesis is tested using observable data.

Simultaneously, interpretivist elements are included to capture the nuances of participants' perceptions and lived experiences. The open-ended questions within the survey allowed for exploration of subjective interpretations concerning male disengagement from education, drawing on traditions of qualitative inquiry that value meaning-making in social contexts (Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

The theoretical grounding of the study is multi-dimensional. It draws from:

- **Human Capital Theory** (Becker, 1993): which posits that investment in education enhances individual productivity and broader economic output.
- **Social Identity Theory** (Tajfel & Turner, 1986): which explains how gender norms and societal expectations influence academic behaviour and engagement.
- **Masculinity Theory** (Connell, 2000): which highlights how institutional structures may inadvertently reinforce disengagement among boys and young men.

These frameworks collectively inform both the construction of the research instrument and the interpretation of results.

5.3 Research Assumptions

This study is built upon several key assumptions, some grounded in existing research and others drawn from the researcher's own critical reflection:

- **Assumption 1**: Male underrepresentation in tertiary education is not a short-term anomaly but a systemic trend observable across Western democracies (Vincent-Lancrin, 2008; OECD, 2023).
- **Assumption 2**: Labour market outcomes are significantly affected by educational attainment levels, with male disengagement leading to lower participation and productivity (Autor & Wasserman, 2013; Reeves, 2022).

- **Assumption 3**: Cultural narratives surrounding masculinity, effort, and identity influence male students' engagement more deeply than previously acknowledged (Buchmann & DiPrete, 2006; Connell, 2000).

These assumptions guided the methodological structure and shaped the choice of variables and analytical strategies.

5.4 Research Design

The research design blends and integrates quantitative and qualitative methods through a convergent mixed-methods approach. This design allows for both breadth and depth in data collection and analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). While quantitative data (from secondary sources and Likert-scale items) offers trend-level insights, qualitative input adds contextual meaning and individual perspective.

The research was conducted in two primary stages:

1. Secondary data analysis of national and international statistical sources, including the Central Statistics Office (CSO) of Ireland and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in the U.S.

2. Primary survey data collection targeting professionals across Western countries using a self-administered online questionnaire.

5.5 Sampling and Data Sources

Secondary Data Selection

To establish a historical and comparative baseline, data were drawn from:

- CSO (2024) – covering a decade of Irish graduate trends by gender

- NCES (2021) – offering consistent longitudinal insights from the United States

- European Commission Reports (2023) – showing gender enrollment patterns across EU member states

These sources are trusted, methodologically rigorous, and suitable for use in longitudinal analysis. They were chosen due to their regular updates, national representativeness, and the relevance of their indicators to educational attainment and labour participation.

Primary Data Sampling

A total of **3**4 responses were collected over a two-week period (14–28 June 2025) via LinkedIn and Outlook. Respondents were aged between 18 and 54, with educational backgrounds ranging from secondary school to postgraduate qualifications. Employment sectors included finance, education, technology, and healthcare.

Key demographics:

- 51.6% Female, 45.2% Male, 3.2% Prefer not to say
- 38.7% Full-time employed, 29% students
- 29% Postgraduate qualification holders

The professional focus of the sample was intentional, aiming to capture insights from individuals with lived experience in both education and the labour market.

5.6 Survey Instrument Design

The survey consisted of three sections:

Section A – Demographic Information

Included questions on age, gender, educational attainment, and employment status. These provided the necessary context for grouping and analysing responses.

Section B – Likert-Scale Statements (1–5)

Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements designed to test core research hypotheses, such as:

- "Male students are underrepresented in higher education in my country."
- "Educational disparities by gender can lead to income inequality."
- "Male underrepresentation contributes to lower workforce productivity."

These items directly operationalised the study's dependent variables (e.g., perceptions of productivity, equity) and were structured using a 5-point Likert scale to allow for nuanced analysis of opinion intensity.

Section C – Open-Ended Question

The final question invited participants to reflect on the long-term impacts of male underrepresentation in higher education. This elicited thoughtful, unstructured responses and was crucial for identifying themes around social withdrawal, digital escapism, or cultural disengagement.

Question Flow Rationale:
Introductory demographic questions eased participants into the survey. The Likert section allowed for structured opinions to be collected efficiently, while the open-ended response at the end encouraged reflection. The flow was designed to reduce fatigue and maximise data quality.

5.7 Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative responses were exported into Excel and analysed using:

- Descriptive statistics – to summarise distribution of responses
- Cross-tabulations – to observe patterns by gender, education level, and age
- Using Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) – i t was used to detect associations between beliefs about male underrepresentation and its perceived economic impact

These methods are standard for attitudinal survey research and have been validated in policy-based education studies (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

Qualitative Analysis

A total of 18 respondents answered the open-ended question. Responses were manually coded using inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process involved identifying recurring phrases and categorising them into major themes, including:

- Disengagement due to identity conflicts
- Lack of institutional support for men
- Cultural pressures surrounding masculinity
- Economic fears related to undereducation

Coding was conducted in a reflexive manner, meaning the researcher remained open to themes emerging rather than imposing predefined categories. This aligns with the interpretivist strand of the methodology.

5.8 Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to the ethical principles outlined by the National College of Ireland. Ethical approval was granted through the college's standard application process prior to any data collection.

Informed Consent was a core component of the research process. All survey participants were presented with an **o**pening statement clearly detailing the study's purpose, voluntary nature, and confidentiality measures:

"This anonymous survey investigates the impact of male underrepresentation in higher education on labour market productivity and economic equity in Western countries. Participation is voluntary and confidential. You may skip any question or exit at any time. By continuing, you consent to take part in this research."

This ensured that participants understood their rights. No personal or identifiable data was collected.

Data Storage and Confidentiality:
Survey data was stored securely in a password-protected cloud folder. Access was limited to the researcher and all data will be deleted post-submission in compliance with NCI and GDPR guidelines.

Harm Reduction and Inclusivity:
Survey questions were neutrally worded and reviewed for sensitivity. Participants were not asked to share personal trauma or experiences, and no questions involved offensive or exclusionary content. Inclusion was promoted by offering a "prefer not to say" option on all demographic items.

Bias Management:
Steps were taken to reduce both interviewer and interpretation bias. All data were anonymised, and analysis was cross-checked with literature to ensure findings were consistent with prior research and not unduly influenced by researcher expectations.

5.9 Limitations and Reflections

While the methodology was robust and informed by both theory and practice, several limitations must be acknowledged:

- Sample Size: With 34 responses, the study offers depth and initial insights, but the small sample limits generalisability. A larger, stratified sample could enhance representativeness.
- Sampling Bias: As recruitment was conducted via LinkedIn, participants may skew toward higher educational attainment and digital engagement.
- Response Bias: Participants with strong views may have been more likely to respond, influencing the overall sentiment captured.
- Single Method of Primary Data Collection: The absence of interviews means that deeper, one-on-one exploration of themes (e.g., identity, motivation) was not possible.

Future Recommendations:

- Incorporating semi-structured interviews with educators or policymakers could improve the interpretive depth of findings.
- Expanding the sample to include non-professional groups (e.g., NEETs – not in education, employment, or training) could add valuable perspective on educational disengagement.

5.10 Summary

This methodology chapter has demonstrated a theoretically grounded and methodologically sound approach to investigating male underrepresentation in higher education and its effects on labour market productivity. By employing a convergent mixed-methods design, the study balances empirical rigor with interpretative richness. The integration of secondary trend data and primary attitudinal feedback enables a comprehensive, multidimensional analysis that addresses the central research question with both breadth and depth.

6.0 Analysis and Findings

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the detailed analysis and findings from both survey data and relevant secondary literature. The objective is to determine whether male underrepresentation in higher education is associated with lower labour market productivity and broader economic inequities in Western countries. The data are evaluated in relation to the research hypotheses: whether cultural norms outweigh institutional factors, and the adequacy of current policy responses.

The analysis is divided into two parts:

1. Quantitative analysis of eight Likert-scale statements (31 responses)
2. Qualitative thematic analysis of 18 open-ended responses

Each section not only describes pivotal findings but also reflects on how these observations align with or diverge from established scholarship—drawing links to Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1993), Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), and masculinity research (Connell, 2000). The chapter closes with a critical reflection on limitations and opportunities for future research.

6.2 Researcher Reflexivity and Expectations

At the outset, there was a clear expectation: professionals would broadly agree that male underrepresentation is problematic and has tangible economic effects. Drawing on Connell (2000) and Buchmann & DiPrete (2006), it was anticipated that respondents would highlight cultural and social pressures as key drivers.

Indeed, qualitative responses confirmed these assumptions: many participants expressed concern about masculinity norms and system-level blind spots. Surprisingly, however, the quantitative data was more equivocal; many responses were neutral, less decisive. This suggested that public understanding of the issue is less advanced than academic literature implies, indicating a potential gap between awareness at policy or scholarly levels versus general societal perception.

This discrepancy prompted a sensitive re-examination of the data, ensuring that the analysis remained open to ambiguity and complexity rather than forcing clarity where it did not exist.

6.3 Quantitative Findings

The survey's Likert-scale questions provided vital insight into perceptions of male underrepresentation and its consequences. Below is a deep dive into key statements and their interpretation.

6.3.1 Recognition of Male Underrepresentation

"Male students are underrepresented in higher education in my country."

- Strongly Disagree: 25.8%
- Neutral: 29%
- Agree: 16.1%

Though statistical evidence shows that women comprise a majority of tertiary graduates in Western nations (CSO, 2024; Vincent-Lancrin, 2008), nearly a quarter strongly disagreed. This suggests a public perception gap, possibly because gender equity efforts over past decades have overshadowed the ongoing rise in female enrolment. This aligns with a growing academic critique—such as Reeves (2022) and Burn-Murdoch (2024)—that male educational disadvantage has become less salient in public discourse.

6.3.2 Impact on Labour Productivity

"Male underrepresentation in higher education contributes to lower male workforce productivity."

- Neutral: 41.9%
- Strongly Agree: 9.7%

This indicates caution among respondents: while many see a potential link, only a minority strongly affirm it. Research by Autor & Wasserman (2013) supports the connection between education and productivity, yet respondents appear less confident, perhaps due to more immediate concerns like employment trends, automation, or reskilling which they see as equally influential.

6.3.4 Income Inequality

"Educational disparities by gender can lead to income inequality."

- Agree/Strongly Agree: 53.3%

A majority acknowledge this connection, reinforcing Hypothesis 3. This echoes findings by OECD (2023) showing persistent wage gaps tied to educational attainment and a report by Burn-

Murdoch (2024) which traces male earnings decline among non-graduates—a compelling quantitative link between education and income distribution.

6.3.4 Employer Perspectives

"Businesses struggle to find qualified male applicants due to reduced male college attendance."

- Agree/Strongly Agree: 38.7%
- Neutral: 22.6%

This view supports concerns about workforce shortages highlighted by Reeves (2022). While not universal, more than a third of respondents perceive tangible hiring impacts. This shows alignment with labour market supply concerns and suggests that educational trends are already influencing sectoral workforce planning.

6.4 Qualitative Themes

Eighteen participants shared free-text views on the long-term consequences of male underrepresentation. Thematic coding revealed four prominent themes:

Theme 1: Masculinity and Cultural Expectations

"Some men feel like education doesn't fit their image, or they're pressured to focus on earning quickly."

Connell (2000) argued that academic disengagement can be a way of conforming to traditional norms of masculinity. This was echoed frequently: participants connected cultural definitions of male success to lower educational uptake. This strongly supports Hypothesis 2, suggesting cultural factors may play an effect greater than institutional ones.

Theme 2: Economic Fallout and Skill Gaps

"If men don't finish university, we'll see lower wages and fewer stable jobs."

This perspective reflects Becker's (1993) conceptualisation of education as a means to economic value. Respondents voiced concerns about potential labour market instability and underemployment—aligned with the idea that skill shortfalls reduce national productivity and individual economic outcomes.

Theme 3: Social Withdrawal

"It's not just about education — some young men seem to drop out of everything."

Referencing Reeves (2022), many participants pointed to a worrying trend of male retreat from not only academia but social engagement in general. Some likened it to the "behavioral sink" of Calhoun's Universe 25 experiment, suggesting social alienation as a deeper societal risk.

Theme 4: Policy Gaps and Institutional Blind Spots

"There are lots of initiatives aimed at women in STEM — that's crucial — but what about those for boys?"

This reflects a systemic bias in policy—flows of funding, attention, and institutional reform disproportionately favor female inclusion, often overlooking boys. This strongly supports Hypothesis 4, confirming critiques from Buchmann (2010) and Reay (2017) regarding male invisibility in gender policy frameworks.

6.5 Integration of Findings with Hypotheses

The evidence aligns most strongly with Hypotheses 2 and 4, regarding cultural factors and policy failures. Quantitative and qualitative data together illustrate that while public opinion remains ambivalent (supporting H1 and H3 to lesser degrees), there is clear qualitative consensus on masculinity norms and structural gaps.

Hypothesis	Supported?	Commentary
H1 (Underrepresentation → Lower participation)	Partially	Neutral leanings; qualitative concerns hint potential
H2 (Cultural > Structural)	Strongly	Culture seen as key driver, well-supported by respondents
H3 (Education gap → Income inequality)	Supported	Majority agreed; literature (Becker, 1993) backs linkage
H4 (Inadequate policy)	Strongly	Expressed absence of male-targeted institutional effort

(Figure.5)

6.6 Critical Reflection and Bias

The data analysis was undertaken with an awareness of researcher positioning and potential bias. As a writer with academic training focused on gender equity, I anticipated a strong linkage between male educational under-representation and negative labour market outcomes. The mixed-method findings tempered that expectation, revealing more ambiguity among respondents than anticipated.

Given the likelihood of self-selection bias—respondents inclined towards discussing gender inequality—neutral and ambivalent quantitative results are particularly noteworthy. This feature is rarely acknowledged in public discourse but emerged clearly here, suggesting expertise alone does not always translate into confidence.

Additionally, the absence of demographic detail on respondents' nationality means "Western context" is primarily Irish/UK-based, limiting generalisability. Responses from professionals may reflect an institutional bias around progressive policy attitudes, drawing less from grassroots male experiences.

6.7 Limitations and Future Directions

While the findings deliver important insights, several limitations should be noted:

1. Sample Size: Only 31 survey participants, 18 open responses—adequate for exploratory study but insufficient for complex quantitative claims.
2. Sampling Bias: Respondents were primarily LinkedIn users in white-collar roles, possibly over-indexing gender equity awareness.
3. Depth of Qualitative Data: A single open comment lacks the texture of full interviews. Future research would benefit from semi-structured interviews with young men and educators, and possibly focus groups.
4. Cultural Scope: The term "Western countries" remains underexplored. Studies involving other European nations, North America, and perhaps even OECD partners could clarify whether these findings generalise broadly.
5. Temporal Bias: Survey conducted during June 2025—a snapshot that doesn't capture shifting policy responses or societal attitudes over time.

6.8 Summary

This chapter has taken raw data and woven it into a coherent narrative. While public perception shows ambivalence, deeper qualitative feedback reveals significant concerns about masculinity norms, economic fallout, and institutional inattention. The findings provide compelling support for cultural explanations of male disengagement and highlight genuine policy gaps, adding nuance to the academic conversation on gendered educational outcomes.

The evidence is now ready to inform the Discussion and Conclusion, where we will link these insights to educational reform, workforce strategy, and future research pathways.

7.0 Discussion

7.1 Interpreting Key Patterns

The data generated from this study presents a complex picture. On the one hand, official statistics confirm a long-term trend of male underrepresentation in higher education across Western countries (CSO, 2024; NCES, 2021). On the other, participants in this study were often neutral or even unaware of this pattern. This dissonance between objective data and subjective perception reveals a public awareness gap, and raises questions about how gendered trends in education are socially framed and prioritised.

The survey showed that only 16.1% of participants agreed that male students are underrepresented, while 25.8% strongly disagreed. Yet simultaneously, over 50% agreed that educational gender disparities can lead to income inequality — suggesting that while participants may not recognise the enrolment gap itself, they are aware of its possible economic consequences. This contrast between statistical blindness and economic concern underscores the subtlety of public understanding: many people may experience the outcomes of male disengagement without recognising its educational roots.

Qualitative data showed far greater alignment with academic literature. Cultural and identity-based explanations dominated, echoing Connell's (2000) and DiPrete's (2013) frameworks, which argue that educational systems and masculine norms often clash. Respondents frequently referenced shame, stigma, or a lack of institutional support for male students. These themes align strongly with Hypotheses 2 and 4, and support literature which critiques policy blind spots in tackling male educational underperformance (Buchmann & Yavorsky, 2010; Reeves, 2022).

7.2 Connections to Literature

This research both supports and complicates earlier studies. For instance, the work of Autor & Wasserman (2013) draws a clear line between educational disengagement and labour force exclusion. While respondents here did acknowledge such outcomes, few connected them directly to male underrepresentation. This suggests that while the economic argument may be persuasive in academia, it has yet to fully resonate among professionals.

The findings more closely reflect work in the sociology of gender, particularly the way male identity is constructed in relation to work, education, and independence. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) provides a useful lens for interpreting comments that frame university as "not for men" or "better suited to women." These cultural perceptions may have more power in shaping male decisions than institutional structures alone — a key distinction confirmed by this study.

Moreover, this dissertation provides evidence to support calls by scholars like Reay (2017) for educational reform that acknowledges gender differences without reinforcing stereotypes. This balance is critical to creating inclusive systems that elevate underrepresented groups without compromising progress made elsewhere.

7.3 Implications of the Study

The implications of these findings are multi-dimensional. Firstly, they point to a need for public education and media discourse that acknowledges the male educational gap without framing it in opposition to female success. Doing so may help reduce defensiveness and allow for policy solutions that are mutually beneficial rather than zero-sum.

Secondly, the study highlights the importance of early intervention. Many respondents pointed to male disengagement happening at the secondary school level — well before university. This supports arguments by the OECD (2021) and Keeley & Scevak (2018) that targeted support, mentoring, and culturally relevant pedagogy must begin earlier in the education pipeline.

Finally, the findings support institutional accountability. Universities and colleges should re-examine student support frameworks to ensure they address male attrition and help remove stigma around academic help-seeking. While attention to female participation in STEM and leadership must continue, this should not obscure the need for equity-based approaches that include boys and men.

7.4 Limitations and What Could Be Improved

Several limitations emerged during the course of this research, some expected and others more revealing.

- Sample Size and Diversity: While 34 responses offered initial insight, the dataset lacked demographic breadth, particularly from men in lower socio-economic or non-professional roles. These voices may have added vital perspective, especially since male underperformance is more acute in disadvantaged groups (Reeves, 2022).
- Time Constraints: Due to academic timelines, the research relied on a single survey method. Including semi-structured interviews or case studies would have enriched the findings and added nuance.
- Geographic Scope: Though the study references “Western countries,” the actual data was heavily skewed towards Ireland and the UK. Including comparative data from other OECD nations could help differentiate cultural vs structural causes of underrepresentation.

- Potential Bias: The researcher entered the study with strong assumptions — notably that male underrepresentation was both real and harmful. Though this view is supported by literature, it is important to acknowledge the risk of confirmation bias, particularly when coding qualitative data. Reflexive journal entries were used to track and limit this influence, though future work should consider external validation methods.

If these constraints were removed, the study would benefit from a mixed-mode research design: combining longitudinal statistical analysis with in-depth qualitative interviews, stakeholder workshops, and policy review. It could also benefit from intersectional analysis, exploring how race, class, or neurodivergence intersects with male educational disengagement.

7.5 Future Recommendations

Based on the findings and reflections above, this study recommends the following actions:

1. Institutional Strategies

   Higher education providers should develop male-sensitive engagement strategies that reflect diversity in motivation, learning style, and emotional barriers. Mentoring, targeted scholarships, and peer support networks could help address gaps in retention.

2. Policy Reform

   Governments and education departments must explicitly recognise male underrepresentation in equality frameworks and policy documents. Balanced strategies that do not reverse female gains but extend support to disengaged males are essential.

3. Early Intervention

   Invest in secondary-level interventions such as career guidance, school-based counselling, and mentorship for at-risk boys. Disengagement begins long before students reach university.

4. Public Awareness

   Public discourse must evolve. Media, political discourse, and curriculum reform must start including male underperformance in the gender conversation without politicising it.

5. Future Research

   Further studies should adopt cross-national comparative approaches to understand cultural variation. Additionally, more work should examine qualitative

dimensions of male identity, particularly how masculinity interacts with perceived academic failure.

8.0 Conclusion

This research was conducted to investigate the implications of male underrepresentation in higher education on labour market productivity and economic equity in Western nations. Through the use of a mixed-methods approach and drawing on both statistical trend analysis and primary survey data. It revealed important insighrful and nuaced data to be interpreted.

With impartial data confirming that male underrepresentation is indeed a measurable and growing phenomenon within Western countries. Crucially, it also highlighted that this trend is not fully understood or recognised by the public, particularly in terms of its economic and societal impact. Importantly, while participants did acknowledge potential income inequality, the vast majority remained neutral about the root educational causes. This discrepancy reflects a significant insight. That in fact data awareness does not always translate into public concern or political momentum which could be devastating to the future of the labour market productivity and social cohesion.

Therefore, qualitative insights from respondents to the nsurvey highlighted key cultural and identity-driven barriers to male participation in education. Many saw academic success as incompatible with prevailing ideals of masculinity — a finding that strongly supports theoretical work by Connell (2000) and DiPrete & Buchmann (2013). These insights give weight to the argument that cultural disengagement precedes institutional failure, and any meaningful reform must tackle both.

Findamentally, this study also reveals an institutional blind spot, which satified the hpyothese for this body of research. Undoubaltably, while great strides have been made in addressing historic inequalities faced by women in education, it is abundantly clear that little attention has been paid to male learners, in particular those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Respondents noted this repeatedly, calling for more inclusive frameworks that recognise complexity without compromising gender progress.

In closing, this dissertation contributes to the ongoing academic and policy conversation about gender, education, and economic equity. It does not argue for a reversal of progress, but for a rebalancing: an education system that includes and uplifts all learners, regardless of gender. The challenge now is to take these insights forward — not just as research, but as reform.

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Appendix A – Survey Results

Figure A1/A2

Respondents by Age Group

A pie chart showing the distribution of survey respondents by age. The largest group (51.6%) were aged 18–24. **Respondents by Gender** distribution of survey participants, showing 51.6% female and 45.2% male.

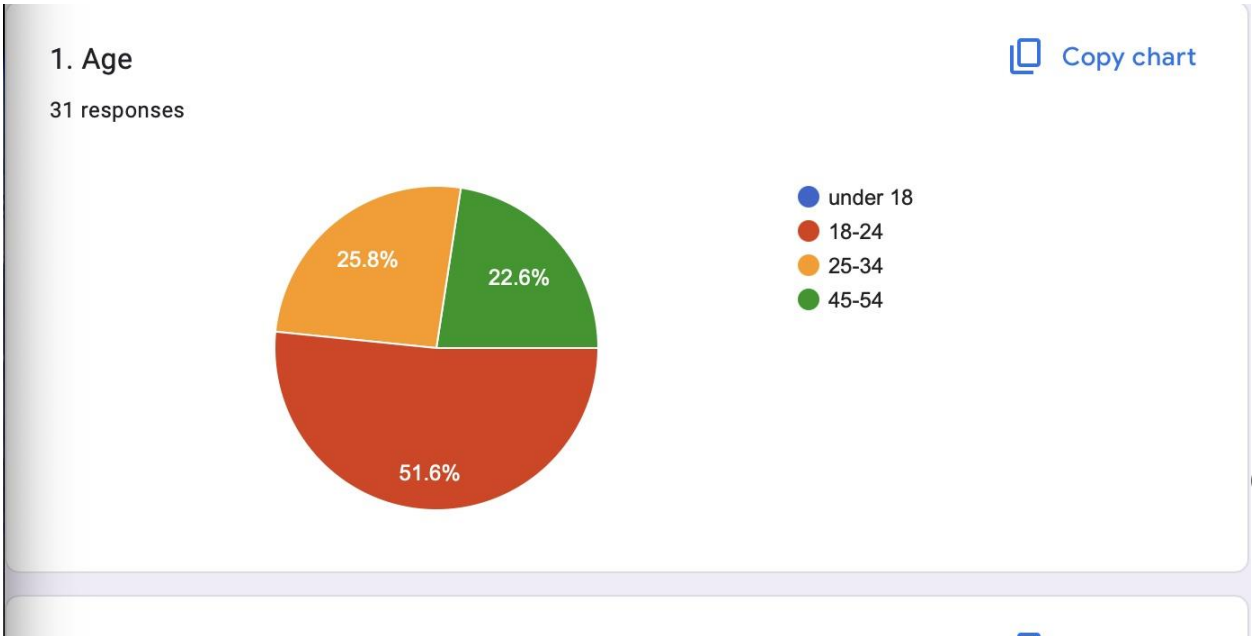


Figure A3/A4

Highest Level of Education Completed

Pie chart indicating the highest qualification level among respondents. 29% held a postgraduate degree. **Country of Residence** Bar chart showing most respondents (77.4%) were based in Ireland.

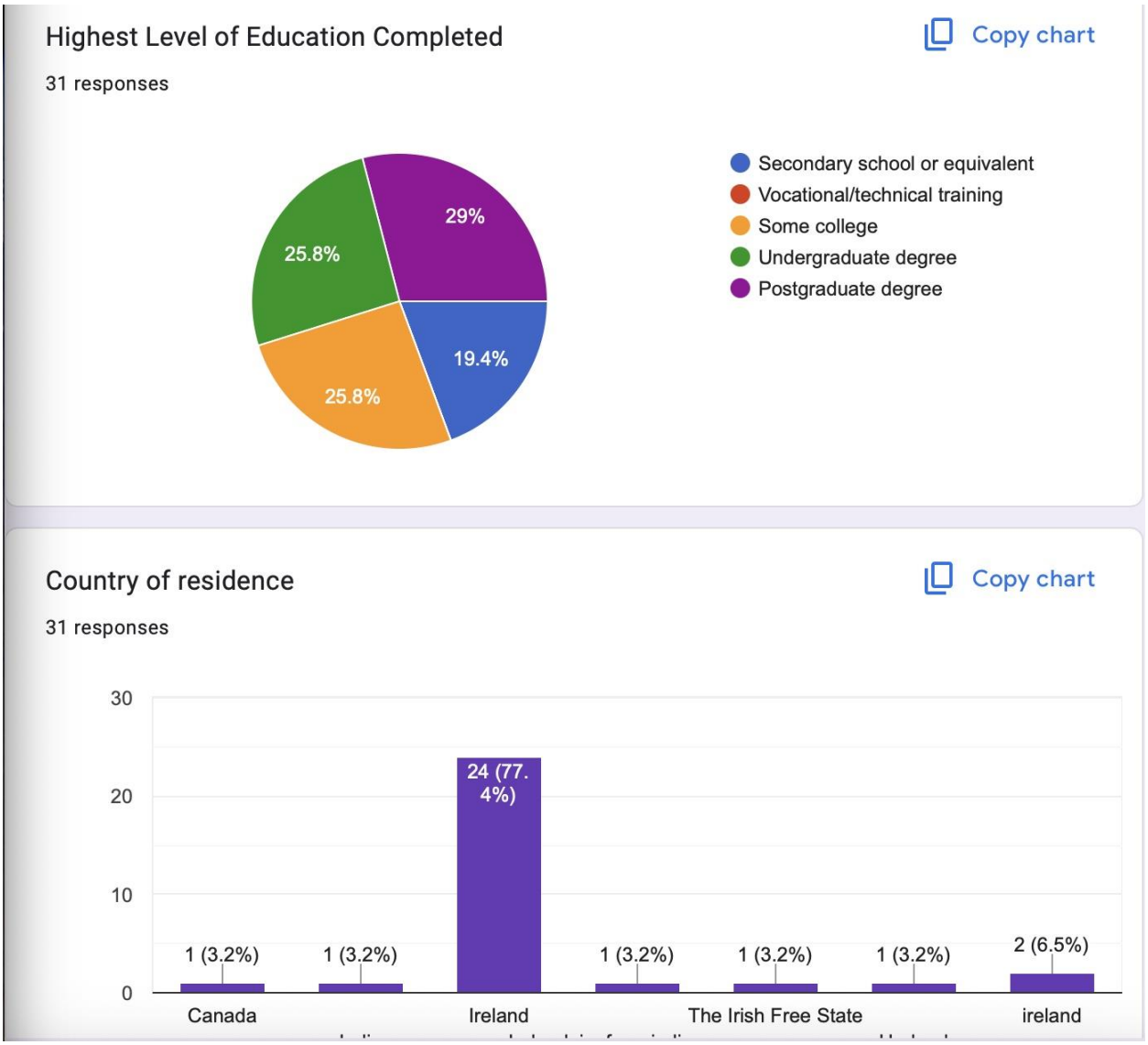


Figure A5/A6

Current Employment Status

Employment breakdown with 38.7% employed full-time and 29% students.**Perceptions of Male Underrepresentation in Higher Education**.Respondents rated agreement with the statement on a 5-point Likert scale. The most common response was “3” (neutral) at 29%.

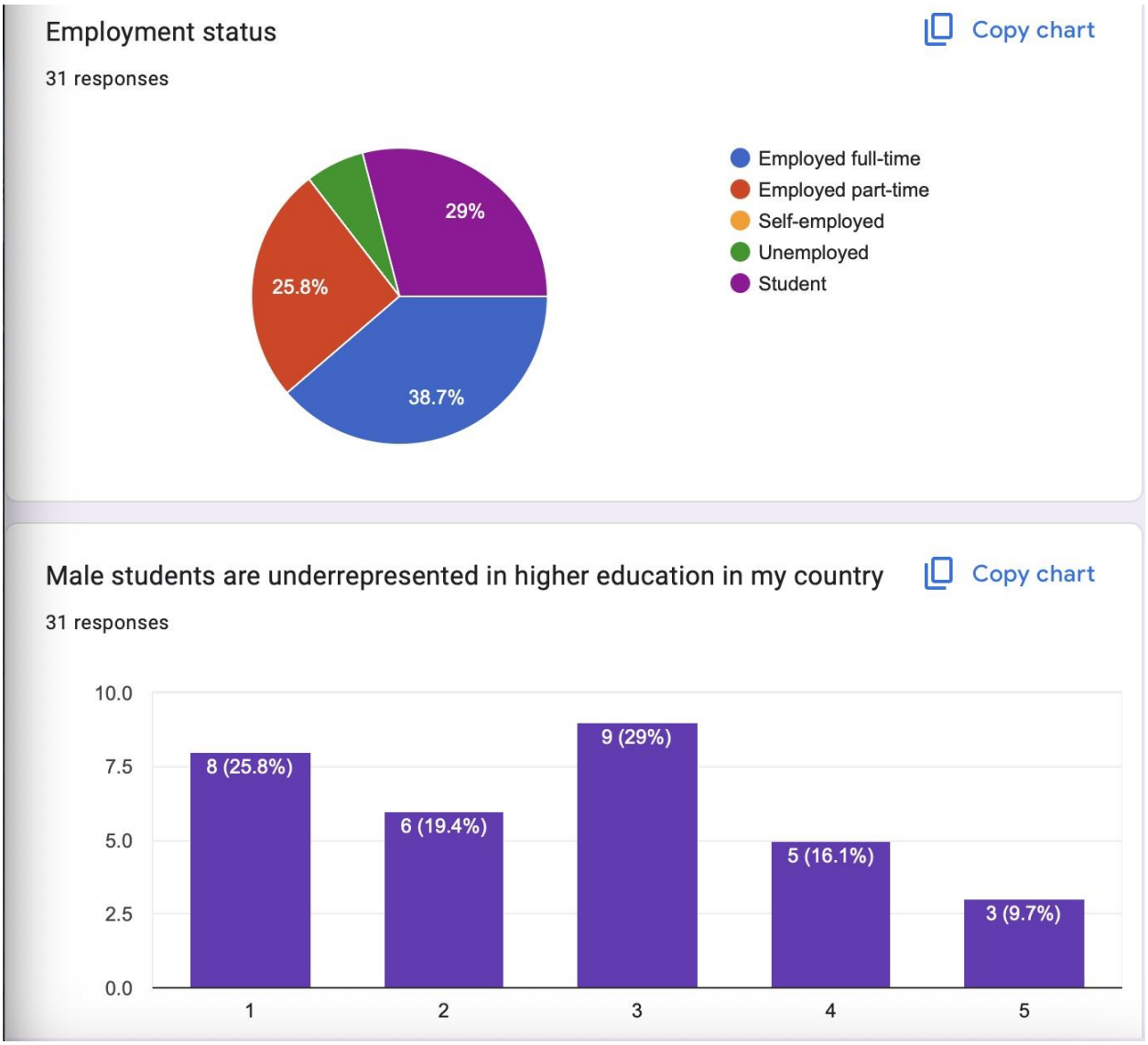
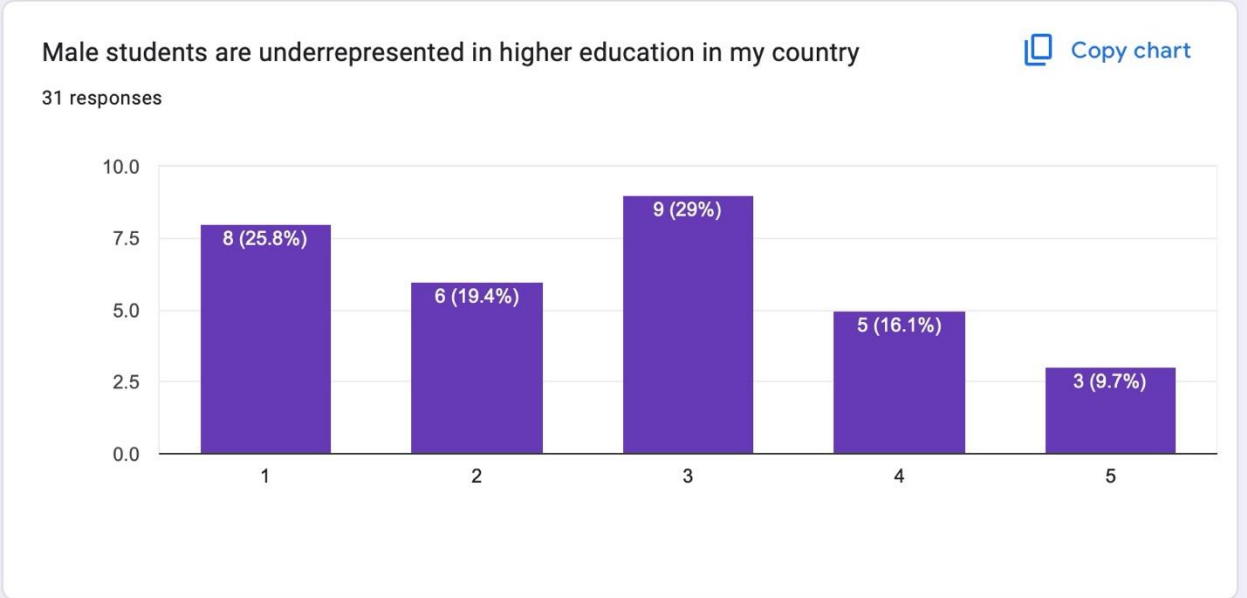


Figure A7/A8

Concern Over Gender Disparities in Enrollment

38.7% of respondents moderately agreed that gender disparities are a growing concern in higher education. Perceptions **of Gender Bias in Academic Support**

Chart reflecting agreement with the statement that the education system supports female academic success more than male success.



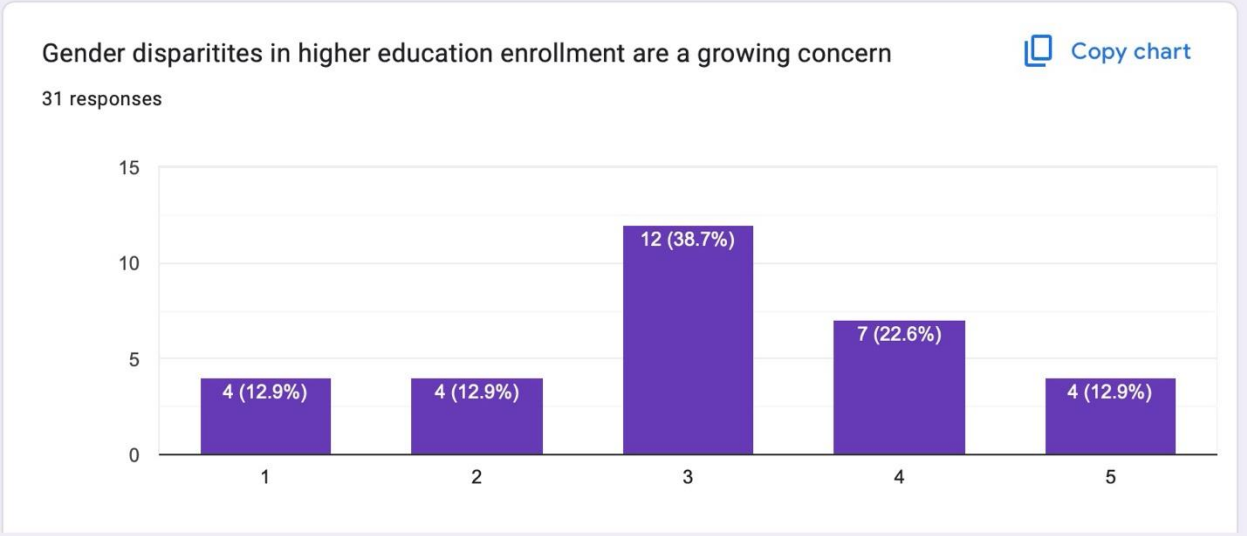


Figure A9/A10

Link Between Male Underrepresentation and Workforce Productivity

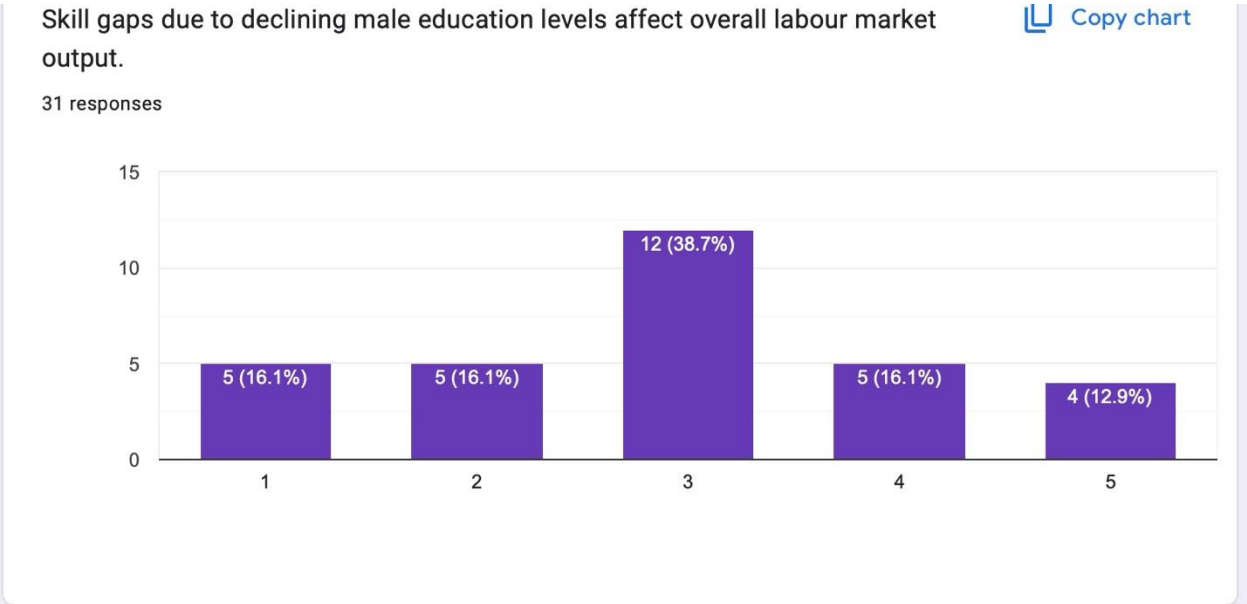
41.9% of respondents moderately agreed that male underrepresentation impacts male productivity.

Figure A11/A12

Impact on Recruitment: Qualified Male Applicants

29% agreed that reduced male college attendance affects employers' ability to find qualified male candidates. **Open-Ended Responses (1 of 2): Perceived Long-Term Effects**

Selected responses highlighting views on the societal and economic consequences of male underrepresentation.



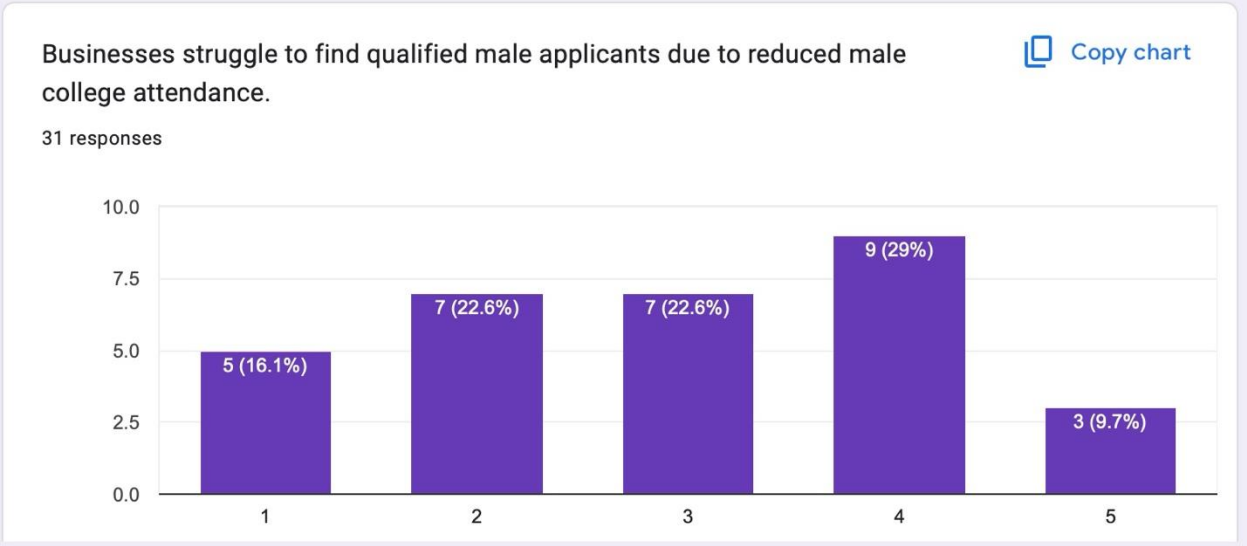


Figure A13/A14

Perceived Sectoral Impact of Lower Male Education Levels

33.3% agreed that male-dominated sectors are affected by lower education attainment among men.**Views on Income Inequality**30% of respondents moderately agreed that gender-based educational disparities lead to income inequality.

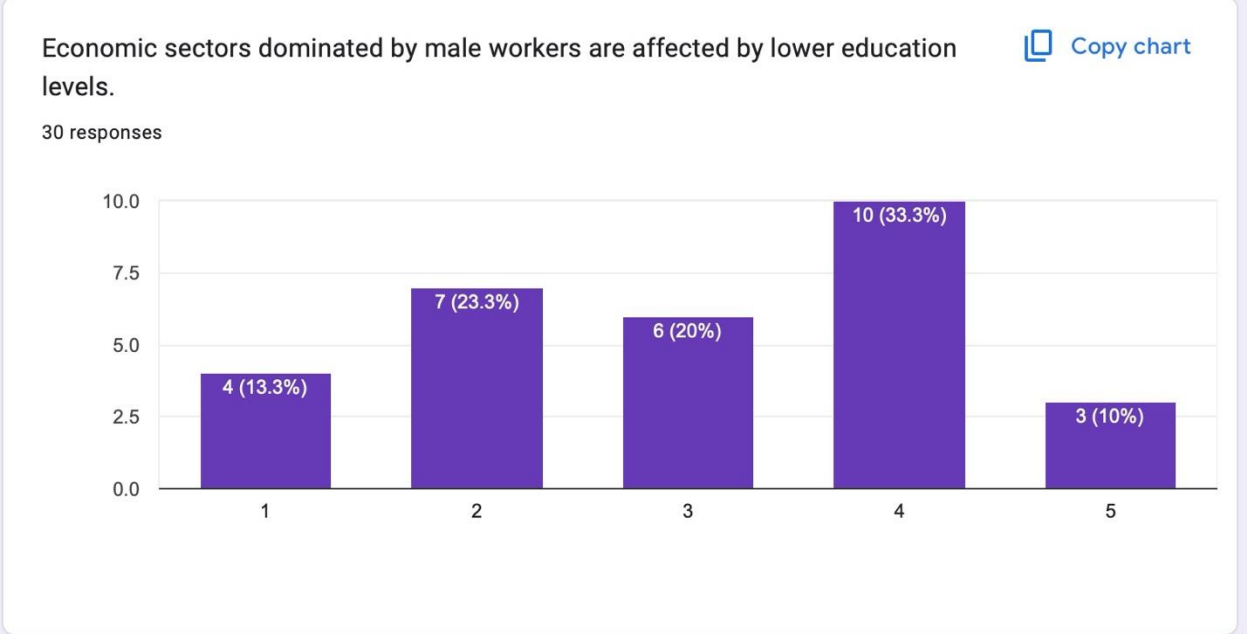


Figure A15

Open-Ended Responses (2 of 2): Gender and Social Impact

Additional participant comments on employment, mental health, gender stereotypes, and equality in education.

In your opinion, what are the long-term effects of male underrepresentation in higher education?

18 responses

Increase in under qualified men in jobs

Inequality in the workforce.

It is not my experience that men are under represented. However, there are certain fields that men do not tend to gravitate towards. Perhaps these could be promoted more.
There are also certain professions such as trade workers that are predominately male workers. Given the wage available to these skilled workers, perhaps there is a shift towards these professions.
There does not seem to be a shortage of men in the work force or holding skilled jobs so maybe in the future there will be a shift.

If fewer men complete higher education long-term, it could lead to lower earnings and fewer leadership roles for them. It might also feed into gender stereotypes and make young men feel more disconnected from learning and society.

I believe that men being underrepresented in higher education can result in limited job prospects, workforce shortages, and greater social inequality in the long term.

In your opinion, what are the long-term effects of male underrepresentation in higher education?

18 responses

I personally do not see male underrepresentation in higher education.

Less opportunities of securing corporate jobs

Males may be less likely to enrol/see the benefit of enrolling into higher education

In my opinion, males are not under-represented in education in Canada

Lower earning potential. Reduced socialisation. Reinforced gender stereotype. Mental health difficulties.

Males can be frustrated when females earn more than them , leading to lack of confidence.

I believe it will create a stigma among males going into third level education

Lack of employment for males in jobs.

We need equal gender to participation in order to have a more rounded educational experience