Manosphere and online misogyny should be treated as public health issues, say UK experts

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The manosphere and online misogyny should be treated by the government as a public health issue, in the same way as obesity or smoking, experts have said.

Writing in the Lancet, the authors of a new report argue that a coordinated response is needed, involving governments, schools, health services and community organisations, similar to the public-health response to tobacco use and ultra-processed food.

“Men’s problems are framed [in the manosphere] as the result of feminism rather than structural conditions, and masculine identity is commodified through products and paid content that normalise and reinforce health-harming and performance-oriented masculinities,” the authors write.

The report defines the manosphere as “a diffuse commercial ecosystem and loose collection of online communities united by shared beliefs about masculinity, misogyny and male victimisation”.

It goes on to outline how the manosphere has evolved into a highly lucrative online industry that makes money by promoting “the most extreme expressions of misogyny and aggrieved masculinity”.

Prof Kent Buse, a co-author of the paper and co-founder of the social justice thinktank Global 50/50, said: “This is a business model, not a fringe. Outrage and grievance are good for business, so the system rewards the most extreme content. Expect the playbook that served tobacco so well: blame the individual, and call regulation an attack on freedom. Public health has a tested toolkit for commercial harms and we should use it.”

He added: “Boys and men are not the problem. The problem is the conditions that leave them isolated and without a secure future, and the companies that profit from their anger and insecurity.”

The authors also point to growing disengagement from education among boys around the world, as well as loneliness, money worries and social exclusion, which can leave young men searching for a sense of belonging. These problems, they say, can make them more vulnerable to online communities that offer simple explanations for their difficulties and often encourage them to blame women and feminism.

Prof Sarah Hawkes, the report’s other author, said: “The manosphere offers boys and young men belonging, identity and an explanation for why life feels hard. “Those needs are real. A response that only removes the manosphere, without offering something credible in its place, will fail. We need to offer boys something better, not just tell them what to avoid.”

Mark Brooks, the policy and communications director at the Centre for Policy Research on Men and Boys, welcomed the report’s position that it was a public health issue and that men, boys, women and girls were all victims of this content.

“Far too often, the manosphere discussion has positioned all men and boys as a problem and not taken into account the broader economic, educational and cultural challenges that drive their engagement,” he said. “Not all men and boys engage with this content equally. We are currently working on research to identify who is most at risk.”

Jake Richards, minister for men and boys, said: “This report lays bare the impact of toxic online influences and why action is needed now. It’s not just an issue for men and boys – it is a wider societal challenge. As the first minister for men and boys, I’m determined to drive this issue up the national agenda, dismantle the manosphere, and give young men the opportunities and role models they need to thrive.