ADOLESCENT BOYS’ HEALTH
- managing emotions, masculinities and subjective social status

Eva Randell

Akademisk avhandling

som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Rektor vid Umeå universitet för avläggande av medicine doktorsexamen framläggs till offentligt försvar i Sal 135, Allmänmedicin, Byggnad 9A, ingång X5, Norrlands universitetssjukhus, den 7 oktober 2016, kl. 09:00.
Avhandlingen kommer att försvaras på svenska.

Fakultetsopponent: Katja Gillander-Gådin, Professor,
Avdelningen för Hälsovetenskap (HLV),
Mittuniversitetet, Sundsvall, Sverige
The overall aim of this thesis was to explore adolescent boys’ perceptions and experiences of health, emotions, masculinity and subjective social status (SSS). This thesis consists of a qualitative, a quantitative and a mixed methods study. The qualitative study aimed to explore how adolescent boys understand the concept of health and what they find important for its achievement. Furthermore, the adolescent boys’ views of masculinity, emotion management and their potential effects on wellbeing were explored. For this purpose, individual interviews were conducted with 33 adolescent boys aged 16-17 years. The quantitative study aimed to investigate the associations between pride, shame and health in adolescence. Data were collected through a cross-sectional postal survey with 705 adolescents. The purpose of the mixed methods study was to investigate associations between SSS in school, SES (parental educational level) and self-rated health (SRH), and to explore the concept of SSS in school. Cross-sectional data were combined with interview data in which the meaning of SSS was further explored. Individual interviews with 35 adolescents aged 17-18 years were conducted. Data were analysed using Grounded Theory, statistical analyses (e.g., chi-square test and uni- and multivariable logistic regression analyses) and thematic network analysis.

Results from all studies suggest that the emotional and relational aspects, as well as perceived SSS, were strongly related to SRH. Positive emotions, trustful relationships and having a sense of belonging were important factors for health and pride was an important emotion protecting health. Physical health, on the other hand, had a more subordinated value, but the body was experienced as an important tool to achieve health. Even though health was mainly perceived in a holistic manner by the boys, there were boys who were prone to dichotomise the health experience into a mind-body dualism when having to deal with difficult emotions.

In conclusion, this thesis demonstrates that young, masculine health is largely experienced through emotions and relationships between individuals and their contexts affected by gendered practices. Health is to feel and function well in mind and body and to have trusting relationships. Having confidence in self-esteem, access to trustful relationships and the courage to resist traditional masculine norms while still reinforcing and maintaining social status are all conducive to good health. Researchers as well as professionals need to consider the complexity of adolescent boys’ health in which norms, values, relationships and gender form its social determinants.

Keywords
Adolescent boys, emotion management, gender, health, masculinity, pride, shame, self-rated health, subjective social status