

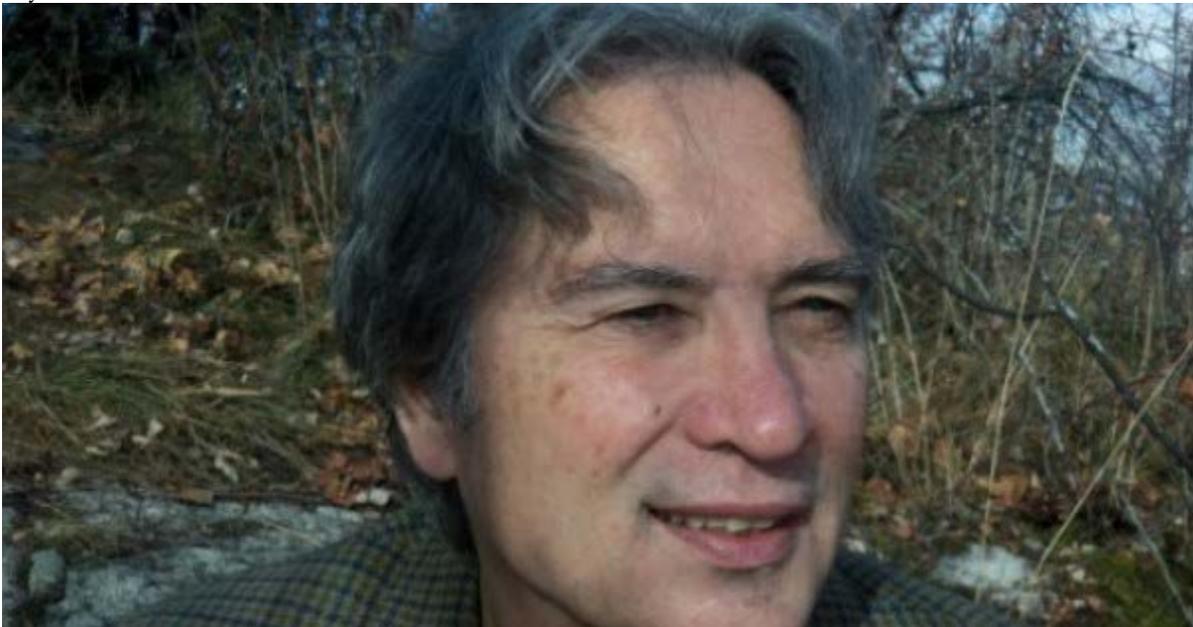
Interview on *Question Time*: <https://medium.com/question-time/ask-dr-robertson-8-a-social-work-betrayal-of-male-889d0cc8b7ed>

## Ask Dr. Robertson 8—A Social Work Betrayal of Male



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By [Scott Douglas Jacobsen](#)

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*Here we talk about male stigma in social work and more.*

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** You wrote an article, recently, which is associated with Humanist Canada. What was the research question around male stigma? What was the tentative conclusion from the article published in *Humanist Perspectives*?

**Humanist Canada Vice-President Dr. Lloyd Hawkey Robertson:** Scott, you always tend to, and I shouldn't overgeneralize and I've heard you do this before, but you tend to ask big questions that take a long time to answer.

The first part of the answer to my question is that the definition of "stigma" has to be clear. It is not the same thing as "discrimination." Certainly, where stigma occurs, you expect discrimination to follow, but you can have discrimination without stigma.

Stigma, in the definition that I am using, is the imputation of a character defect, which when believed renders members a targeted group to be unfit, not also for interactions but, for particular social interactions.

I was looking for examples of stigma that fit that definition in the population. So, using that definition, I wanted to know when gendered stigmatization occurs. That was the research question.

To do that, I had to examine the experiences of a group of men. I had a sample of 16 men who agreed to partake of in-depth interviews on their experiences. I matched those experiences to the definition of stigma.

The conclusion was that stigma does occur. Now, given the restrictions of the research method, I am not able to say how prevalent that stigma is in society. That can be answered by future research.

**Jacobsen:** If we're looking at those 16 men, what are some highlights from their self-reports?

**Robertson:** The two takeaways, the 16 men had some overlap. Some men experienced two forms of stigmatization. One was stigmatization with respect to role as parents. Men are less responsible, less able, or less reliable to be good parents and more of a threat, therefore, to children and women in general.

The other form of stigma, which was related to that. It is more about the threat rather than the ability level. Certain jobs, men had to prove that they were not a danger to functional success in those jobs.

One of the jobs being social work.

**Jacobsen:** How is this reflected in the numbers of men entering those professions in history as well as the present day?

**Robertson:** Overwhelmingly, in social work, men are underrepresented. Some of this underrepresentation can be traced to stigma. In my study, for example, I found that two men who were in the social work profession were judged to be in the first case not able because men don't relate as well, and don't communicate as well.

(Ed. Robertson interviewed two social workers, two social work students, and three social work clients totalling 7 individuals or almost half of the sample in the study, who all experienced or reported stigma from members of the profession.)

Therefore, this man had difficulties and was treated differently than if he had been female in the same position. As I said, discrimination, itself, is not by itself the same thing as stigma.

But if it is believed that because of men as a class have a particular characteristic that can be stigmatic, in the second case, a man graduated from social work. In his first job, and in his first job as a matter of fact, he was given the responsibility for assessing a woman, a single parent, and the women complained to his supervisor that he reminded her of an abusive uncle or an abusive family member in other words.

The supervisor asked as a claim of sexual harassment and was unwilling to interview the woman earlier for fear of furthering her trauma. As, not the male but the, female members of this persons team in social work who he had just started to work with, whether they felt comfortable with him given that he had been accused of sexual harassment, he lost his job.

I don't believe a woman who some man said, "Well, she reminds me of an abusive aunt." I don't believe that woman may have been treated the same way with those suppositions. That is, supposition of being dangerous. Now, this is a complete surprise.

I didn't, at any point, in the survey ask whether a particular profession was possibly had stigmatic views against men. I, certainly, did not single out social work. But it kept coming up. Remember, these are 16 men.

Two of them were students. In one case, the man in class argued against what was being presented; that domestic violence was a male event perpetrated by women. He brought forward evidence in terms of research that showed that domestic violence as 50-50. Most of the research that I have seen is 50-50.

It can be initiated by males or females in the domestic situation. He provided an argument. He defended his position. By the end of the conversation, he was compared to mass murderer Marc Lepine.

There is a suggestion here that because of a man disagrees with the stats being used; therefore, he is, now, like a mass murderer. It may be hard to understand the leap. But we can understand what happens, subsequently. He was drummed out of the profession.

He was kicked out of school. He was later won on a settlement because it was unjust, clearly. Why would this happen? Is it that only women can challenge such statistics on domestic violence without getting a reaction of this sort?

Noting only 16 men in the study, 3 of them were in events, where they were in custody battles with their ex-spouses. In each case, a bias was evident. I'll give you one example. This example is, actually, from your province of British Columbia.

The male, in this case, bought a house close to the school, where his children went, because he wanted them to be comfortable going to school. He wanted to make this transition as easy as possible for the kids, because he knew a divorce is difficult on the children.

The social worker, in this case, said to him; that he was wasting his money. Because, in her opinion, the woman gets the children pretty much all the time. That can be an example of discrimination and not necessarily stigma.

But then, the same social worker about a month later after the woman in question had ignored an order with regard to visitation rights and the man complained. The social worker says, "Well, you are the man. In my opinion, I have to go with the lesser of two evils."

There you have evidence of a stigmatic attitude. This kind of things happened over and over in the study. There was surprise that one profession should be mentioned so often in such a small sample.

**Jacobsen: Even though, we have preliminary findings on some male stigma in social work in particular. What would be further directions of research deeper into the subject matter of social work male stigma or into male stigma in other domains of work?**

**Robertson:** This method used in this study established that the conditions satisfying the definition of stigma exist as applied men. Quantitative methods are needed to establish how prevalent this stigma is found in Canadian society.

It was significant that nearly half the men in this sample recounted examples of stigma in their experiences as workers, students and clients of the social work profession; however, this does not prove that the profession as a whole is rife with this stigmatization.

The stigma could be limited to time or place or to, for example, men of a particular personality type. A study aimed specifically at the social work profession is needed answer these questions. It would then be possible to replicate such a study on other domains of work.

**Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Dr. Robertson.**

**Robertson: Okay!**