

Men and health inequalities in Scotland

Reflections from stakeholder engagement sessions

In the most deprived areas of Scotland, men can expect to die [13 years earlier](#) than men in the least deprived areas. At the same time, men in Scotland have a shorter life expectancy than men in other UK nations and most Western European countries. Socioeconomic factors, including living standards, are a key part of this story.

We explored these factors last year in our [2025 Inequality Landscape report](#). We found that men aged 18-44 are often overlooked in policy despite being at high risk of early mortality – particularly from so-called ‘deaths of despair.’ Whereas other groups such as children and pensioners are targeted through specific policy interventions, young adult men are often supported only when they reach the point of crisis.

This year, we have continued to look into the relationship between living standards and policy among this group. In February, we [released a report](#) which found that poverty among young Scottish men has increased sharply since the pandemic, providing an early warning light of further deteriorations in health and other outcomes. Strikingly, this increase was not observed among young adult women, nor was it observed to the same degree in any other UK region – with the result that young men are now more likely to be living in poverty in Scotland than anywhere else in the UK.

We have also been conducting a series of Action Learning Sets, as part of a work package dedicated towards [Strengthening Policy Implementation](#) in Scotland. These sets involved a range of practitioners working across operational and strategic roles in Edinburgh and North Lanarkshire councils in a range of different sectors including justice, housing and employability.

Building on this work, we held three stakeholder engagement sessions across February and March, where we presented our findings on poverty among young adult men and early insights from our Action Learning Sets. These sessions included two roundtables – one with politicians and one with experts in poverty, public health, and social policy – in addition to a webinar aimed at a wider audience. Through these events, we sought to understand a) whether our findings resonated with attendees’ work and experiences, b) barriers to preventative policy for young adult men, and c) any gaps in our understanding.

The discussions were wide-ranging, but a few key themes emerged: educational outcomes and transitions from school; wider trends in policy and the economy; and men’s social and cultural experiences.

Educational outcomes and transitions from school

Those who attended the events were especially concerned about trends among men aged 18-24, and many of the discussions focused on the link between school and work. One issue that surfaced repeatedly was the cohort of young men who went through this transition during the pandemic, which disrupted both the education system and the labour market and resulted in a [notable increase](#) in the proportion of school leavers without a positive destination. There were also broader questions around the role of rising ill health, particularly among young people.

These concerns are clearly warranted. Our report found that the increase in poverty among young men since the pandemic was indeed concentrated among those at the younger end of the spectrum and those who are out of work. And [previous research](#) in Scotland found that people aged 16-19 who were not in education, employment, or training were likely to be less qualified, were less likely to be in work, and had poorer health outcomes a decade later than those who had a positive destination after school. At the same time, our last [Inequality Landscape report](#) found that educational gains among men, including improvements in positive school leaver destination rates, have generally not been matched by growth in employment rates or household income over the last decade.

Clearly, intervening early and at key transitions can have powerful, preventative effects, and Scotland has both programmes and data which specifically focus on young people as they transition out of education and into the workforce. For instance, Scotland has the [Young Person's Guarantee](#), which provides earmarked funding to support access to employment or education-related opportunities for young people, or the [Modern Apprenticeship](#) programme, which is aimed at people under 24, although older adults may take part, and predominantly taken up by [men aged 16-24](#).¹ Skills Development Scotland also provides data on workforce and educational participation among young adults, for instance, through the [Annual Participation Measure](#), which allows us to understand the relationship between men aged 16-19, work, and education. The Scottish Government's data on [attainment and destinations for school leavers](#) also provides a snapshot on where young men are going upon leaving secondary school.

Nevertheless, attendees voiced a broad concern about whether or not the programmes currently in place are sufficient to support young men during the transition out of school.

Wider trends in policy and the economy

Throughout the sessions, those who attended pointed to the 'big picture' of the economy, but also the granularity needed to understand that picture for different groups of young men. For example, men facing the worst outcomes in Scotland often live in formerly industrialised regions, which may experience long-term, multi-generational [challenges](#) with employment. Discussions touched on the recent rise of the 'gig' and 'warehouse' economies, the historical importance of trade union representation for protecting real incomes, and the need for both policy and research to grapple with differences between regions, sectors, and demographic groups.

Another common theme was the long-term impact of austerity, which continues to sharpen trade-offs between preventative and crisis spending. Focusing specifically on the social security system, attendees highlighted the role of non-compliance sanctions under Universal Credit, which primarily affect young men. Discussions also touched on the ways in which recent data sharing laws, such as GDPR, can hamper efforts towards joined-up delivery, while development such as digitalisation can inadvertently exclude certain groups.

¹ As of [December 2025](#), 72% of people currently in training through the Modern Apprenticeship programme were men, and 54% of all apprentices were men aged 16-24.

Men's social and cultural experiences

It is difficult to discuss men without acknowledging their [cultural surroundings](#), especially given the current discourse around toxic masculinity and the 'manosphere.' Attendees were keen to understand how these trends have informed our work. For example, some suggested that men may not always be willing to engage with the support that is available to them. These issues are important, but also complex and sensitive. They raise big questions – not least because men aged 18-44 are a large, diverse section of the population without any single 'culture'.

The engagement sessions also focused on one specific aspect of men's social experiences, namely their living situations. Our report found that the post-pandemic rise in poverty was concentrated among men who are single without children but living with other adults, such as their parents or housemates. This prompted discussions around how incomes may or may not be shared within households, and how all of this is reflected in official poverty statistics. Attendees also discussed how co-residence was clearly the result of deprivation, reflecting an inability to afford one's own home, but also how this could lead to self-reinforcing cycles of poverty and immobility.

Next steps

Our Strengthening Policy Implementation workstream is still in progress. We are currently collecting, analysing, and synthesising a range of data, including commissioned research working with community peer-researchers to gather the perspectives of men aged 18-44 in Edinburgh and North Lanarkshire. However, there is undoubtedly more work to be done exploring the relationship between men, policy, and preventing poor health outcomes.

With this in mind, we are keen to hear more about working across policy cycle from design to implementation and evaluation, particularly in terms of upstream prevention. More generally, we are interested in evidence-based decision making in relation to young adult men.

Following up on our work on poverty among young men, we are eager to explore the following questions, among others:

- **Poverty measurement.** How do the poverty statistics change – particularly for young men – when more plausible assumptions are made around the distribution of resources within households? How do they change when key groups that are currently omitted from the statistics – such as people who are experiencing homelessness or who are in custody – are included?
- **Co-residence.** The literature indicates that men are disproportionately likely to be living with parents or housemates, particularly in more deprived areas. How do patterns of co-residence vary across Scotland? What are the causes and consequences, including for poverty and health?
- **Post-school transitions.** Although there is already research in this area, are there additional data sources and methods that we can use to better understand the trajectories of men after they leave school, along with the implications for poverty and health?
- **Wage erosion.** The post-pandemic rise in poverty appears to reflect falls in the real wages of other household members such as parents, but the poverty data is not ideal for

conducting detailed labour-market analysis. Can we identify these individuals in more fit-for-purpose data sources to understand the factors at play?

If any of this sounds interesting, please [get in touch](#) – we'd love to hear from you.