



Centre for Adult Social Care Research
Canolfan Ymchwil Gofal Cymdeithasol i Oedolion

Understanding Community-Based Men's Mental Health and Wellbeing Groups in Wales

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Overview

- Discuss findings from a survey we conducted of community-based men's mental health and wellbeing groups across Wales.
- **Take-home message:** Community-based men's mental health and wellbeing groups are becoming an increasingly important source of support, providing spaces where men can discuss personal problems and emotional wellbeing and challenging assumptions that men are unwilling to talk about mental health.



Why we did the research

- Men in the UK die by suicide at over three times the rate of women, often linked to masculine norms – toughness and self-reliance.
- Statutory mental health services are overstretched
- Community-based men's mental health and wellbeing groups are growing
- There is limited evidence on how these groups work or their impact on mental health



About the research

- Survey of men's mental health and wellbeing groups across Wales (late 2024)
- Developed with Men's Sheds Cymru, Helpu Cymru, and Side-by-Side organisers
- 30 responses from 17 of Wales's 22 local authorities
- Explored activities, participation, organisation, barriers, and promotion
- The work was supported by the Centre for Adult Social Care Research at Cardiff University, with funding from Health and Care Research Wales



Attendance

- Most groups reported increasing membership, indicating growing rather than declining demand
- Average attendance was around 13 men per group
- Nearly three-quarters of groups were open to all men, rather than targeting specific sub-groups
- Flexible participation was common, with most groups allowing men to drop in and out as needed



Purpose, values and publicity

- Over 80 per cent of groups identified providing companionship as central to their purpose
- Nearly all groups endorsed supporting women's needs and rights, challenging stereotypes of men's groups as exclusionary
- Facebook was the primary publicity tool, alongside Instagram, local press, and flyers
- This reliance on digital and informal channels raises questions about accessibility and who may still be excluded



What do the groups actually do?

- Around 40 per cent of groups offered practical, hands-on activities such as building, woodworking, or gardening
- Nearly 80 per cent of groups actively promoted emotional openness
- Almost two-thirds described their role as providing support for personal issues
- Around 30 per cent offered some form of one-to-one support



Barriers and challenges

- Many groups reported significant challenges in day-to-day functioning and sustainability
- Funding and lack of time were the most commonly reported barriers
- Most groups relied heavily on volunteer leaders balancing paid work and other commitments
- The vast majority operated on a not-for-profit basis, without paid or professionally trained staff



Implications for social care and public health services

- Increasing attendance suggests growing demand for community-based support
- Volunteer-led and peer-support models may provide an important source of local support
- Reliance on volunteers raises questions about quality, consistency and safeguarding
- Challenge: maintaining the informal and accessible nature of groups while ensuring appropriate support for volunteers and group members



Challenging assumptions about men and mental health

- Nearly 80 per cent of groups promoted emotional openness
- Talking was central to many groups
- Direct conversations about mental health may be more acceptable than often assumed
- Findings reflect changing ideas of masculinity
- Context may matter as much as willingness to talk



Conclusions and future research

- An increasingly important source of support for men's wellbeing in Wales
- Often volunteer-led and peer-support based
- Challenges simple assumptions that men do not talk about mental health
- Much remains unknown about how these groups operate and their impact
- Further qualitative and evaluative research is needed

