



RESEARCH

INFORMATION



WIGWAM-S

Well-beInG in Working-Age Men - Sheds

WIGWAM-S: WellbeInG in Working-Age Men - SHEDS



Aims

Men's Sheds are community groups where men meet, socialise and make things. Although open to all ages, they tend to attract older men. Working collaboratively with community partners and male-focused community groups, including Men's Sheds, the aim of this research was to:

1. Better understand what works well in male-focused initiatives such as Men's Sheds in supporting men's health and wellbeing
2. Provide recommendations about how male-focused community initiatives might encourage attendance of younger men (16-65), particularly those living in disadvantaged areas, to support their health and wellbeing needs, too.



KEY FINDINGS

Key points arising from the study:

- In general, male-focused initiatives work well in supporting men form good relationships, feel supported and have good mental health and wellbeing.
- There is a lot of value placed on intergenerational learning, with both younger and older men seeing the impact and benefit this can have on all generations.
- Some working-age men in disadvantaged areas think male-focused groups are just for older men and only offer hobbies they're not interested in. Local men need to know that their local male-focused group can be whatever, and for whoever, the men in the community want.
- Other reasons men gave for not going along included juggling work and childcare, lacking confidence, feeling lonely, being embarrassed about not having a job, and feeling like their heavy drinking or drug use might get in the way. By trying to work with men and being flexible around some of these challenges, male-focused groups have great potential to welcome a wider range of men in disadvantaged areas and support them live with better health and wellbeing.



WHAT DID THE STUDY INVOLVE?

1. A review of the literature on community male-focused groups to support health and wellbeing in disadvantaged areas.
2. A series of community café events (n=9) and male-focused group café events (n=4) in disadvantaged areas to gather views on what aspects of male-focused groups particularly support the health and wellbeing of working-age, disadvantaged men and what maybe needs to change.

Community engagement: Community partners were integral to this project from its conception. The Community Partnership Group, which includes community partners and key lay individuals, met monthly for planning, and reviewing project objectives and progress. They also helped market and run our café events and informed how we shared findings with others.



WHAT WERE THE RESULTS AND WHAT DO THEY MEAN?

Phase I: Findings from review of the literature

Findings from the literature helped us see what aspects of male-focused groups men felt supported their health and wellbeing:

Where does the group meet?

Meeting in community settings that are not linked with formal health services helps men feel comfortable talking about their health and wellbeing and seek more formal help when the need to.

Who is involved?

- **Just men** results in men feeling safe, familiar and comfortable sharing experiences with similar men (e.g. men with addictions), sharing of male experience, decreased loneliness, increased sense of belonging
- **Inviting healthcare workers for a visit to the group** results in safer and more effective monitoring of men's health, better relationships with health professionals, improved health seeking behaviours and health literacy.
- **Approachable and dependable group leaders or committee members** results in increased engagement in interventions, men feeling empowered and respected, increased agency and autonomy over health decisions

What do men do in the group?

- Activities where men work together 'shoulder to shoulder' (e.g. making things, problem solving) results in sharing of personal issues/ health problems, increased bonding and comradeship, confidence, and trust in others.
- Provision of **space for socialising** or social activity (e.g. group discussions, coffee) results in increased friendships, decreased social isolation and loneliness, increased social skills, decreased social anxiety. Peer support from other men results in increased individual and group resilience, increased confidence, decrease in negative health behaviours (e.g. drug use), and shared experience.

What works well?

- **Giving men ownership over the group as equals** results in empowered men with increased confidence, sense of pride, agency and control, giving men a voice when their voice is not usually heard
- **Using common interest** (e.g. football) metaphors, symbols and materials (e.g. football language) results in provision of a safe non-threatening conversation topic, increased social bonding, and shared identity.





WHAT WERE THE RESULTS AND WHAT DO THEY MEAN?

Phase II: Engagement events

We conducted a variety of engagement events to seek opinion on what works well and what else might be needed to better support health and wellbeing of working-age men in disadvantaged areas.

4 Shed cafes
(n= 43 shedders)

9 community cafes
(n= 70 community men)

Online sharing and learning event with individuals supporting men's health
(n= 27 attendees representing charities, NHS H&SCPs, voluntary groups)

By combining our findings from the literature review and the data we gathered from our engagement events, we formed key themes around what worked well in supporting men's mental health and wellbeing:

Emotional regulation
Purpose in life
Healthy behaviours



Help seeking
Identity
Connection



Each theme looked at: What aspect of men's health and wellbeing is being addressed (purple), what is the main focus of the intervention/group/activity (yellow), how might it contribute to better health and wellbeing (blue) and what might be the outcome for a man attending (pink). The example below shows the Emotional Regulation theme:

Men struggling with emotional difficulties in a community where there is pressure on them to be self-reliant, strong emotionally and physically, this can lead to a lack of being able to handle emotions when they come up. They bottle things up.

Performing tasks that allow time and space for chat about emotions with people who have similar experience while also doing activities that are physical. Creative activities included

Realisation that other people have similar thoughts and that they don't have to feel ashamed to speak about emotions. This is facilitated by banter and a feeling of brotherhood in and out of the meetings

Better emotional regulation outside of meetings because they have been able to 'vent' to others that understand them. This may impact positively on relationships with family and friends outside of the group.

How can Men's Sheds and other male-focused groups better support the health and wellbeing of working-age men in disadvantaged areas?

Some of the main take home messages regarding how male-focused groups might be better suited to supporting disadvantage, working-age men are:

- Provide activities that are appealing (e.g. darts, pool, table tennis, cards)
- Have food-related events (e.g. curry nights, breakfasts, making food together)
- Embrace technology and recognise its integral part of younger men's lives (e.g. provide areas for gaming)
- Better marketing of the group making the prospect of going along appealing (ensure the needs and wants of local men are reflected in what the group can provide)
- Flexible groups that accommodate wider needs by meeting at sociable hours and supporting different members' needs (e.g. single dads, working parents, those struggling with life issues who may want to dip in, dip out but still feel supported)
- Making sure the group is accessible and cost effective to attend (e.g. good bus routes, centre of community)



IMPACT THE FINDINGS COULD HAVE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Working-age men in disadvantaged communities, male-focused community groups

- Two factsheets produced for the Scottish Men's Shed Association ([Sheds factsheet](#)) and community groups working in disadvantaged areas ([Community factsheet](#)), outlining recommendations as to how best to engage and support working-age men in their communities.

Policy

- Investing in upstream public health initiatives that are acceptable to and engage men warrants further investigation to explore their potential to, in the longer-term, reduce pressure on existing health services and provide an alternative means to support men better look after their health and wellbeing.

Practice

- Ensure initiatives to support men in disadvantaged communities are embedded in the community so men know what exists and feel confident attending.
- NHS and community initiatives supporting men should consider partnership working to ensure the health and wellbeing needs of local men are best met.

HOW WILL THE OUTCOMES BE DISSEMINATED?

- Working closely with our community partnership group we ran a feedback event held in Men Matter, Scotland, with invited speakers/stall holders including Dads Rock, Men's Craft, Scottish Men Sheds Association, Prostate Scotland, Diabetes Scotland. 47 participant, including men from the communities we engaged with. (8th Oct 25)
- Invited to present WIGWAM-S findings at Scottish Men's Shed Association AGM (3rd Oct 25)
- WIGWAM-S study presented at European Health Psychology Conference (Sept 25) and poster presentation at the UK Public Health Science Conference (Newcastle, April 26)
- Two WIGWAM-S peer-reviewed publications submitted to BMC Public Health

CONCLUSION

- Male-focused initiatives, such as Men's Sheds, can, and often do, support all ages of men, from different backgrounds to live with good health and wellbeing.
- In particular, this study found that such initiatives help men feel more connected, better supported with emotional wellbeing, gain a sense of purpose, maintain healthy habits, engage in help-seeking, and strength identity and social connection with others.
- Further research to assess the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of such interventions is required. (An application to NIHR PHR for a follow-on study was unsuccessful (August 2025), however a revised application has been submitted to NIHR PHR (April 2026)).

RESEARCH TEAM & CONTACT

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