

# Targeted regeneration could be key to boosting coalfield communities

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Decades after the pit closures, coalfield communities still face significant health problems and economic difficulties, according to new research.

A Durham University-led study shows that [health](#) problems including long term limiting illnesses such as chronic arthritis, asthma and back problems, are significantly more likely in some of these areas.

However, the results, published in the Journal, *Health and Place*, also reveal that some less deprived coalfield areas are faring relatively well in terms of health.

Some of these areas seem to have weathered the economic storm better in terms of health, suggesting that regeneration efforts and resilience of local [communities](#) may be helpful for health and wellbeing, as well as for the economy and jobs.

The findings reinforce calls for increased and more focussed government assistance, particularly in poorer, predominantly rural coalfield communities.

Co-author of the Durham study, Professor Sarah Curtis, Department of Geography, said: "Coalfield areas vary considerably and it's essential that [government policy](#) recognises the different levels of support that are needed and helps the areas with the greatest need.

"Some mining communities have struggled and need more assistance, whilst others have fared quite well, demonstrating considerable resilience in the wake of the huge job losses that affected these regions.

"A lot can be learnt from the success stories and regeneration schemes that have worked well. It will be helpful to share knowledge about the conditions fostering that success."

Researchers at Durham University's Institute of Hazard, Risk and Resilience, the Dalhousie University, Canada, and Teesside University, looked at self-rated outcomes for health in a [national survey](#) of 26,100 individuals. These include 4,750 people from the country's 55 coalfield areas, who were compared with others in the survey living in other areas across England. They found that people living in coalfield communities were 27 per cent more likely to report having a limiting long term illness.

Between 1984 and 1997, 170,000 people lost their jobs in coalmining as pits closed across England and male employment in the English coalfield area fell by twenty-five per cent.

Pit closures left coalfield communities with many problems including environmental degradation, economic disadvantage, social deprivation and poor health outcomes. These have been exacerbated in some places by physical isolation, poor road access and inadequate infrastructures.

A recent government study, the Clapham Review, highlighted the need to tackle coalfield inequalities. The government has launched a £30m fund to provide assistance over two years via the Coalfields Regeneration Trust (CRT). The fund aims to help the most challenged coalfield areas to become self-sustaining communities, overcome health and skills inequalities, and develop their own plans for economic growth and community renewal.

The results of the Durham-led research show that while significant problems remain, particularly in some of the more deprived coalfield areas, other areas have fared much better.

Professor Curtis added: "Communities that 'bounced back' from the pit closures of the 1980s may have been more able to adapt and may have had more local resources to overcome the job losses that hit them. The aim of regeneration is to help all mining communities to do this."

The researchers emphasise that better economic conditions, well-being and health go hand-in-hand and believe that their research could help to identify areas that might benefit the most from regeneration especially from initiatives like the CRT.

Andy Lock, Assistant Director at the Coalfields Regeneration Trust said: "The study confirms our experience of working in coalfields over the last ten years. We know that [health problems](#) are still very severe in some places and our challenge from Government is to continue to address health inequalities.

"Our success is built on working collaboratively with communities and to support their responses to local health needs. We have also led on activity such as our Midnight League and Sports Legacy programmes that have engaged thousands of people in healthy lifestyle activities and we will continue to work with communities to develop solutions that reduce the health issues highlighted in Durham University's study."

Provided by Durham University

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