

UK needs to redesign health policies for men

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UK health policies should be redesigned to become more accessible for men, according to a new report by the Work Foundation.

Terms such as 'mental health' risk alienating men, so services should be marketed differently and as part of targeted, gendered campaigns to reach men at greatest risk of poor physical and mental health. 'Out of hours' access to GP surgeries and [health services](#) should also be considered if more men are to be encouraged to get the help and support they need, researchers claim.

While much attention has rightly been given to the effect of women's increasing presence in the [labour market](#), there has been less focus on changes experienced by male workers over the last decade. The new report, entitled 'Men's mental health and [work](#): The case for a gendered approach to policy', sheds new light on this important—and often overlooked—issue. By studying recent evidence through a 'male lens', the report calls on Government to commission more 'gendered' research to understand the different ways men and women engage with health services, arguing that work should be recognised as a health outcome due to the impact employment has on mental and physical health and wellbeing.

The Work Foundation's Dr. James Chandler is the lead author of the report. He said: "On the face of it, it may seem that the average man in the UK has not experienced the same rate of change as the average woman in the world of work, but scratch a little deeper and we find rapid, significant changes to men's experience in the workplace, which

has affected their health and wellbeing.

"There are striking differences between men and women's health in the UK—and we find this is often reinforced by the work they do. Men are more likely to do physically dangerous work, more likely to be self-employed and more likely to work away from home for extended periods. The jobs that tend to pose the biggest risk to physical health and safety are often amongst the lowest paid, with less job security. It is a fact that men are also at far greater risk of suicide than women—particularly those aged 55—64—and those working in male-dominated sectors like construction.

"These inequalities suggest there's a real need for health policies to be redesigned with men in mind. The Department of Health and Social Care should consider reframing mental health services as men can find commonly used terms alienating. Learning from interventions in different contexts and settings and creating resources like 'stress manuals' could make a real difference to overcome the stigma men associate with 'mental health' in the UK. An additional problem is that help available through GPs and other services is only available during normal working hours. While this affects both men and women, the evidence indicates it is more problematic for men as they typically do not want their boss/colleagues to know they are seeking medical help—particularly for mental health problems. 'Out of hours' or 'after hours' services could therefore make a big difference to their health and wellbeing."

While accidents and injuries at work have fallen significantly over the years, the risk of mental ill-health at work has grown. In the construction industry for example, ten times the number of workers die from suicide compared to industrial accidents. This suggests that while health and safety at work remains crucial, men's mental health may be a bigger public health priority.

Evidence suggests employers also have a role to play in providing support, for example by marketing Employee Assistance Programmes and Occupational Health Services to male employees carefully, being mindful of the terminology used to describe the support to encourage early intervention and prevention.

Martin Tod, Chief Executive of Men's Health Forum, said: "The relationship between men, work and mental health is vitally important, but under-researched. We welcome the Work Foundation's report and support their recommendations.

"For many men, employment and the ability to provide are core to their sense of self-esteem and well-being. It's not a coincidence that high unemployment rates are associated with increased suicide rates. Well-paid and meaningful work is extremely important to men's mental health.

"This report rightly highlights the role that employers can play in supporting men's [health](#). But, we also need [mental health](#) services to recognise that not all employers are enlightened employers and to design their services in that light. Too many men fear they will face stigma if they show weakness—and for too many men that fear is justified. The language needs to be right and the ability to access confidential out-of-hours services is essential."

Provided by Lancaster University

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