

Understanding Male Engagement: what we're learning at Wellbeing Scotland

Over the past year we have seen a notable rise in men coming forward for support with trauma caused by child abuse. Much of this engagement has come from men in mid and later adulthood, aged 41–50 and 51–60. Younger men, by contrast, remain far less represented.

Our data from this period offers a window into how men experience trauma, how they seek help, and what services like ours can do to support them earlier and more effectively.

Taking the first step: why assessment matters

For many men, reaching out for support is a significant emotional hurdle. Staff frequently observe high levels of anxiety before the first appointment, especially for men who have never spoken openly about their experiences.

In some cases, men have demonstrated a strong need to disclose a significant amount of their experience during the first session – effectively "offloading" years of experiences and emotions – before becoming more settled and able to engage with the therapeutic process. Some men present to the service having had previous counselling, while others appear to be disclosing their trauma for the first time. Significantly, a client may have previously accessed therapeutic interventions or mental health support without ever having felt able to disclose or explore the underlying abuse and trauma.

Once that initial anxiety eases, many men show remarkable commitment. Staff describe clients who stay engaged despite pressures such as poor physical health, housing instability, legal proceedings or relationship difficulties. Some leave feeling more hopeful and more able to understand their experiences, a testament to the impact of trauma-informed support.

How Men Present: and why it varies

One of the strongest themes emerging from our data is the diversity of men's experiences. There is no single "male presentation," and assumptions can be misleading.

Older men often struggle with emotional expression, particularly around sadness, loss or vulnerability. Some adopt an "it is what it is" stance when discussing trauma, reflecting generational expectations around masculinity and emotional resilience .

Younger men, however, frequently show high emotional engagement and dedication to the process. Some in their 30s and early 40s demonstrate immense commitment despite complex life circumstances.

Another emerging theme is the number of men questioning whether they may be neurodivergent. Staff note that trauma-related behaviours can overlap with characteristics associated with ADHD or autism, and that increased public awareness may be shaping how clients understand their experiences. This highlights the importance of continued staff development around trauma, mental health and neurodiversity.



Groupwork: connection, safety and shared wisdom

Group support has been a particularly positive space for male engagement. Men attending groups often present with issues such as anger, anxiety or low motivation. Yet staff consistently observe that male-dominated groups are respectful, safe and supportive environments, even when participants have lived with anger or violence.

One of the most powerful findings is the natural emergence of peer support. Some men take on informal mentoring roles, offering guidance to others who are earlier in their recovery. This shared wisdom helps reduce isolation and reinforces that their experiences are understood by others. It also challenges the misconception that men are reluctant to support one another emotionally.

What This Means for Service Development

The rise in male engagement is encouraging, but it also raises important questions. Younger men remain significantly underrepresented, and understanding why is essential. What prevents them from coming forward, and what could we do differently to reach them earlier?

There is no evidence that men are less likely to attend or complete support. In fact, many show exceptional commitment. However, younger men may need more reminders, flexibility or reassurance. The message is clear: services should avoid a one-size-fits-all “male approach” and instead recognise the varied ways men enter and engage with support.

The broader picture suggests that many men live with the impact of trauma from child abuse for decades before seeking help. Increased media coverage of the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry and Scotland’s Redress Scheme may be helping men recognise their experiences and consider therapeutic support.

Looking Ahead: reaching the men who remain unseen

Increasing male engagement is not simply a demographic trend. It is an opportunity to reach people who may have felt unable to seek support for most of their lives.

By continuing to learn from the men who do come forward, we can continue to refine our approach and develop services that respond to the different ways people experience, express and recover from trauma.

Groupwork, connecting with peers and flexible, trauma-informed practice will all play a vital role in reaching more men, including those who have not yet felt able to speak.

“Continuing to understand what prompts men to seek help when they do, what barriers prevented them from doing so earlier, and what makes them remain engaged will help us refine our approach. It may also enable us to develop more targeted ways of reaching men who remain outside our services, particularly younger men. The particularly positive experience of male groupwork also suggests opportunities to build on peer connection and shared experience as part of our service.”



Sergio Bechelli, Assessment & Support Practitioner