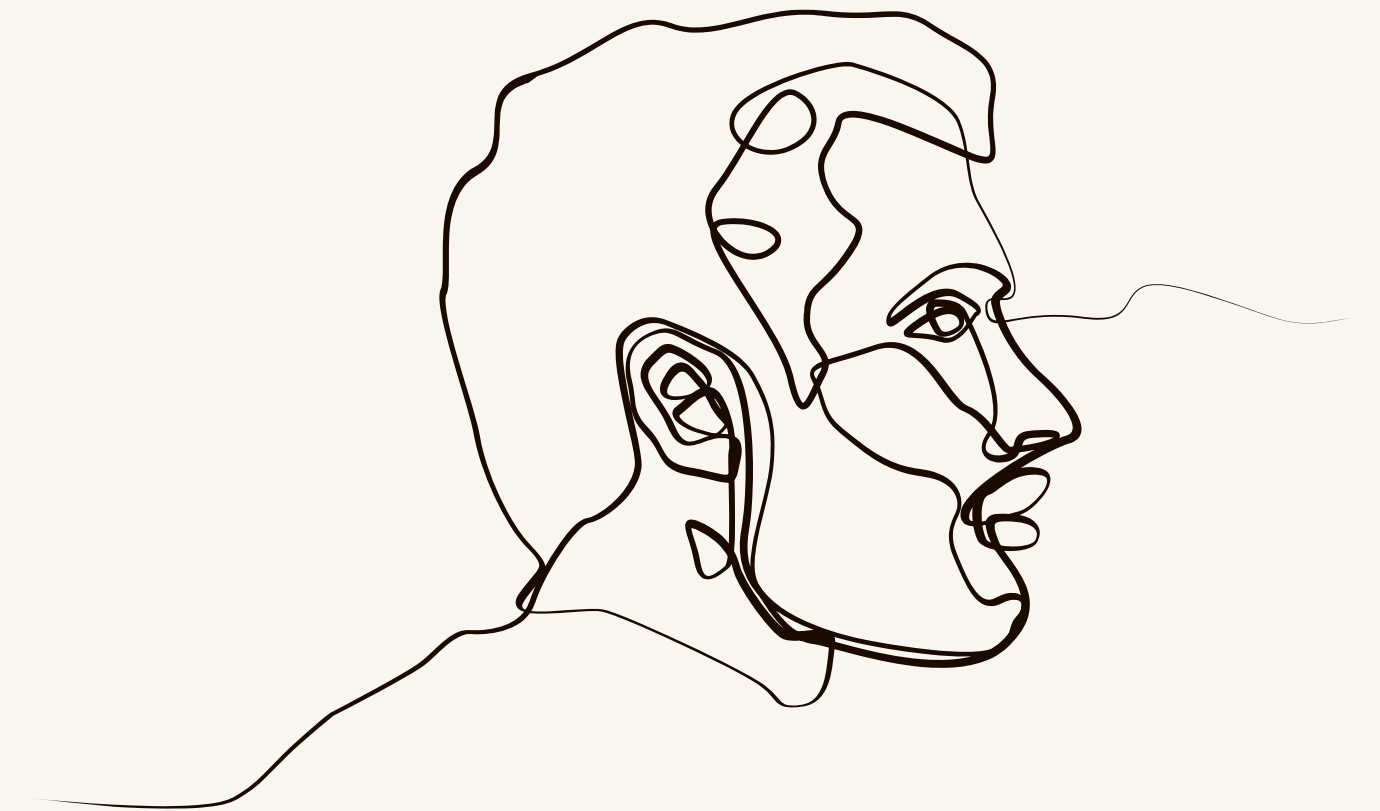




Men Minds: justice and mental health

Dr Nina Vaswani
CYCJ Webinar



University of
Strathclyde
Glasgow



MONASH
University

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Aim

To better understand young men's mental health

To improve mental health research, policy and practice for young men

Focus

Marginalised young men aged 16-24:

- LGBTQ+
- refugee/migrants
- in conflict with the law

Approach

Young People's Forum:

- shape research design and materials
- peer research fieldwork
- analysis
- outputs and dissemination

Diverse perspectives

YPF Sessions

Transcripts from around 80 hours of sessions with 12 forum members

Interviews and focus groups

20 young men took part in peer interviews and focus groups lasting 45-90 minutes

Survey data

40 young men completed an anonymous online survey



Age 16-24

26 had justice experience

38 identified as LGBTQ+

26 were asylum seekers/
refugees or migrants

Other identities and
characteristics e.g.
nationality, neurodiversity,
race, place, class etc

Young men's mental health

- HBSC 2022: School-aged boys in Scotland report higher life satisfaction than girls. More likely to reporting feeling 'very happy' and 'confident'. Girls reported more low mood, depression and anxiety
- SALSUS 2018: boys report less school anxiety and enjoy school more than girls
- Scot Gov 2024: 61% of users of in-school counselling are girls, 36% boys.
- CAMHS 2025: 55.7% of referrals girls and 44.3% boys
- Census 2022: 20.4% of girls and young women (16-24) reported a mental health condition, compared to 10.5% of boys and young men



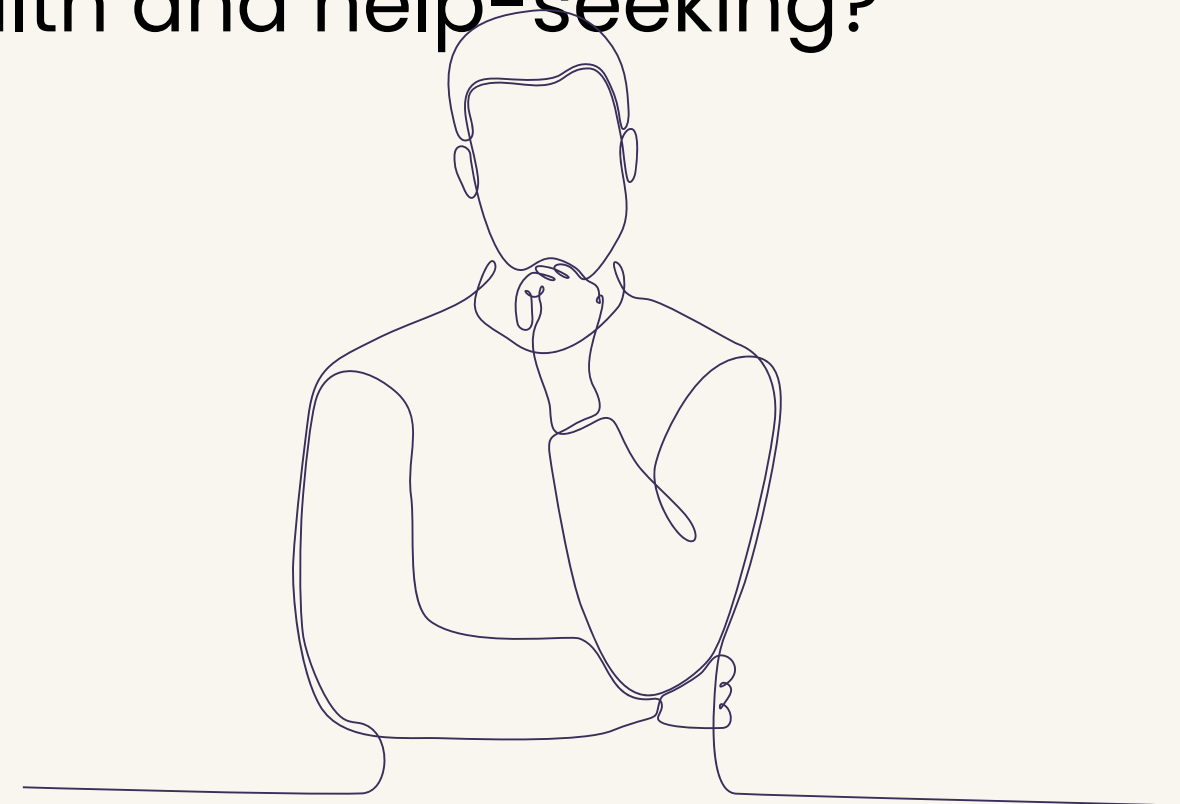
Young men's mental health cont...

- Scot Gov 2023: boys make up 89% of all primary school **exclusions** and 69% of all secondary school exclusions
- SQA 2025: Boys **underperform** compared to girls in every stage of secondary education, especially at A grade.
- SHERU 2025: young men between 16 and 19 are more likely than women to not be participating in **education, employment or training**
- SHERU 2025: Deaths of despair – **two-thirds drug and alcohol deaths** in Scotland are men aged 18–44
- Scot Gov 2022: 83% of **convictions** are men, and they receive longer sentences. 95% of the **prison population** are men.
- Young Minds 2023: Suicide is the leading cause of death for young people and around **75% of all suicides** in the UK are boys or men



Unpicking discrepancy?

- differences in underlying mental health needs and conditions?
- difference in presenting symptoms?
- clinical and diagnostic practice?
- differences in mental health literacy?
- differences in attitudes towards disclosing mental health and help-seeking?
- availability and suitability of supports?



Adversity and disadvantage



Being a young man in 2025

- poor or difficult school experiences
- socioeconomic conditions and structural factors
- isolated, lonely, excluded
- complex and conflicted identities
- stereotypes and negative connotations

Daniel: I think we're the most criticised group of folk but we get the least amount of credit out of any sort of...I don't know what you would call it. Demographic type, you know what I mean?

Arthur: As a man, I feel you can't really fail... because it feels like you've got nobody behind you really. Nobody I can rely on, I feel like my life is in my hands. I remember there were some really hard times."

Antonio: I had a terrible time in school, genuinely. Because I got diagnosed with autism when I was 17, when I'd left school, you know what I mean? So there was hundreds of things in school that could probably be put down to that. Not as an excuse, but just like, maybe we'd understand you more. And that was never obviously in place during school, so I was just seen as a wee dick or just some lad that's always just kind of, like – aye, we would actually just do whatever, you know what I mean?



Talking about mental health

- Assumption – young men don't talk about mental health
- Their environments are not conducive
- Lack of trust and compassion
- Risks in opening up
- Additional burdens for marginalised communities
- Emotional and mental health literacy
- Futility – mental health is structural and political

Antonio: I grew up with my dad being a very masculine man and wouldn't talk about his feelings or that. And then I think that kind of just went onto me, if you know what I mean, when I was younger. And it kind of made me think, right, I shouldn't be talking about my feelings.

Tyler: It's no really anything you speak about. I grew up with a lot of my pals the same like. It's like you dinna really speak about things like that because they are dealing wi' big problems

Survey: I have autism so I feel kinda cut off from people sometimes and I don't really know what mental health *feels* like



Talking about mental health

- Lack of opportunities to talk were detrimental
- Asking for help was difficult at crisis point
- Young men recognised the benefits of talking
- Talking and help-seeking reconfigured as a strength
- Peer support: trust, credibility and representation

Kenan: I think speaking to another man is the best solution to our mental health, yeah? Since they can relate to it. But yes, I think our conversation as men is always shallow, yeah? We just try to mention a problem and we just agree on that without going any deeper. I think that's just our way of showing our concerns or something.

Brandon: Also, what I would say ...is that it takes a bigger man to admit that you have mental health problems and for you to see these different kinds of things"

Craig: It feels good. It's good to express your feelings, it is good to talk about it. Right. You always feel better



Coping with mental health

- self-medication and substance misuse
- anger and violence
- sports and exercise
- work

Blair: I go to the gym to let out my anger and feelings. I go when no-one is there to see me let it out, so I'll go at like 3 in the morning.

Alasdair: And those negative emotions destroy the hope. But then... they don't destroy it but it turns it into anger and rage and almost you become like a bulldozer, smashing through anything that can help you.

Cameron: I work any hours that are going. Because see, ... if it's a Saturday and there's naw football on, obviously because I don't really talk to my mates, it's – I'm just sitting about, like I f*cking just wasted another day. Might as well go work and... like I can actually just tire myself to the point where my mind can't race. So I can just come in and if my mind tries to race, I just fall asleep.

James: When I first phoned the NHS one of the first things they ask is like 'do you take drugs, do you take cocaine and that?' And if you say aye, they go 'aw well we can't do anything for you because that's what's doing it

Mack: I didn't think about mental health before I came in here, I was just bleezing drunk oot ma nut. F*ck it. I didn't have health.

Craig: Aye, you had different coping strategies then

Mack: Aye, it was just like avoidance. You would just drink, take drugs and wouldnae think of it about anything, because you'd be out ya nut and f*cking thinking about what cloud you were floating to next, know what I mean?



mental health impact on justice

- presenting symptoms and coping mechanisms interface with justice system contact
- help-seeking at crisis point

Anon: When I was at the actual hospital speaking to two mental health nurses, and they accused me of being threatening and violent, and basically kicked me out of the hospital without anything, while I was, like, violently in tears, and I'd tried to hang myself, and they just didn't care, they just sent me away.

Antonio: It must've been about two days after my 17th birthday. So it would've been, like, the day before that we were all out drinking, and then basically a whole thing happened and we ended up going on a train and daein' stuff that now I regret doing, obviously.



justice impact on mental health

- targeting and labelling: gender, race, class
- slow justice processes
- direct harms caused by the system
- reduced hope and opportunities for the future

Anon: I would just – honestly, quickly, I pure – like, my own experiences with police and that; I've been tased, hit with a bat, pepper sprayed, handcuffed, thrown to the ground, everything you could think of. So that's why I've just gained a pure hating for the polis.

Antonio: My two options were jail or suicide. That was my mindset at that point. Because it was like, I knew that there was a very high chance of going to jail for that

Brandon: Like I feel if the Police stop you I can't say a thing

Ibrahim: Yeah similar I've seen it. I've seen how police, in front of my face how they treat a Black guy compared to how they treat the White guy.

Tyler: I think it's good that you are trying to work on people's mental health and that cause there is suicides in young people. I mean, it does happen and that ... See if you were treated better fae people and that. Like that's what I mean, sometimes in the halls and that you could be going through a bad time and that and like staff are just like taking the piss out of you...

Liam: Making it worse.

Tyler: So just making fun of you and all that, ken what I mean? And just like, say things about your missus and all that while you're pure sitting broken in the jail and that.



prison-specific issues

- pains of imprisonment
- hypermasculine environment in which to be vulnerable
- access to medications and illegal drugs
- availability of resources and supports
- lack of care and detachment

Paul: He was like that “Alright, I’ll come back down and see you in two weeks.” And I’ve not seen him since. Some guy came doon, and it was a completely different guy, and he came doon a couple of days ago and asked to see me. And I was like “Mate where have you been, I don’t even know you for a start, I’m not going to talk, you’re no the first person I met”.

Kyle: People need their coping mechanisms and there should be more here to like encourage boys to have healthy coping mechanisms cause that's why, like, drugs are so prevalent in custody and especially like Spice and that. Yeah, because it's a coping mechanism for boys eh?

Craig: Aye, there’s obviously....I’m sure there’s support but where? I don’t know who to ask for...

Mack: mental health support team

Paul: not for mental health support. You have sexual health and you have aI don’t even know ...there’s nothing, there’s no wee room up in Activities 1 that if your heid’s f*cked you can go and sit down and someone’s there to talk to you. There’s nothing like that.

Ryan: There’s the CAMHs where they will give you a fidget spinner

Craig: Aye they give you a fidget spinner and send you on your way!



THE YOUNG PEOPLE'S
FORUM ISN'T THERAPY...
BUT IT HAS BEEN GREAT
FOR OUR MENTAL HEALTH.
WE'RE REALLY PROUD OF
OURSELVES AND THE
PROGRESS WE HAVE MADE.
IT'S A HUGE ACHIEVEMENT
FOR US AS INDIVIDUALS
BUT IT WILL ALSO HELP
MAKE A CHANGE FOR
SO MANY OTHER
YOUNG MEN.



Thank you for listening

