

Young men's experience of the labour market

Young men have received a 'bad press' in the 1990s. A major concern is that they have underachieved in the labour market relative to their female peers and previous generations of young men. There are fears that unemployment amongst young men has led to a rise in family breakdown and anti-social behaviour and even the emergence of an 'underclass'. But what is the extent of this relative lack of success in the labour market, and what factors might explain it? Research - by Bruce Stafford, Claire Heaver, Karl Ashworth, Charlotte Bates, Robert Walker, Steve McKay (now at PSI) and Heather Trickey of the Centre for Research in Social Policy - found that:

- f** The nature of young men's underachievement is complex, and possibly less severe than some people may have feared. Nevertheless, some young men during the mid-1990s did experience problems securing paid employment.
- f** Moreover, the economic position of young men has deteriorated over time. Later generations of young men are more likely to enter the labour market as unemployed and have a greater chance of subsequently being unemployed. However, more young men have also stayed on in full-time education.
- f** Of those joining the labour force, young men were more likely to find full-time jobs and young women part-time jobs. Young men also tended to earn more than young women because they worked longer hours.
- f** For young men shorter spells of unemployment and movements into employment were associated with: living with a parent/relative (not including a spouse/partner); having vocational qualifications; having no health problems affecting their ability to work; possessing a driving licence; and having previous work experience.
- f** The researchers conclude that the following policies might help combat the problems some young men face: providing financial and other support to families to assist those young men who wish to live with their parent(s)/relative(s) to do so; using the Careers Service to target education and training resources on vulnerable young people; encouraging parents with no formal educational qualifications to re-engage in education and training; and using health professionals and schools to target health education programmes at young men.

The extent of young men's underachievement

This research examined how young men have fared in the labour market both over time and in comparison with young women in the mid-1990s. It looked at 'underachievement' in terms of young people's experiences of employment and unemployment, their leaving unemployment and the types of employment found.

The research shows that the nature of young men's underachievement is complex, and that it is less severe than some may have feared. However, difficulty in securing paid employment and avoiding unemployment remains a key feature of some young men's underachievement during the mid-1990s.

Experiences of employment and unemployment

The dynamics of employment and unemployment

Notwithstanding that changes in the economic cycle affect the proportions of young people entering the labour market over time, the economic position of young men has deteriorated over time. Those young men entering the labour market in the late 1950s and 1960s usually found paid work, and any subsequent experience of unemployment was very low indeed. A small number remained in full-time education, typically pursuing academic qualifications before finding paid employment. However, as each successive generation has reached the age of 16 and moved through the years of their youth, the likelihood of unemployment has become much greater. More young men have entered the labour market as unemployed and their likelihood of subsequently experiencing unemployment is greater. But they were also more likely to have stayed on in full-time education than past generations of young men.

Not only are fewer young men entering paid employment, but the proportion with unbroken employment records until the age of 25 has also declined over time.

Young men's and women's experiences of employment and unemployment in the mid-1990s

Approximately three-quarters of young people completing compulsory schooling stay on in full-time education. Of those joining the labour force, young men were more likely to have found full-time jobs and young women part-time jobs. But proportionally more young men were unemployed, although more young women were looking after the

home/family and not seeking paid work, therefore some will have been effectively 'unemployed'.

Leaving unemployment

Not only were young women less likely than young men to be unemployed, but they were more likely to leave unemployment and to have shorter spells of unemployment, although the difference – a median of four months for young men and three months for young women – was relatively small.

Types of job found

Changes in types of employment over time

The nature of the first jobs that young men have held has changed over time. For those young men with first jobs lasting more than three months, the underlying trend has been for fewer to be members of a trade union or an occupational pension scheme or to hold a permanent position. To the extent that recent cohorts of young men are less likely to enjoy these characteristics in their first jobs, they could be said to be underachieving relative to previous generations. However, these changes probably reflect wider developments in the economy and are not unique to young men.

Young men's and women's jobs in the mid-1990s

It is less clear that young men in employment were doing less well than their female peers in 1994-5. Young men in work tended to have different types of occupation to young women, but were not disadvantaged in that they were more likely to earn more and just as likely to have a unionised job.

Unemployed young men's and women's jobs

Similarly, unemployed young men and women who had previously worked and/or subsequently found employment did so in different occupations (and industrial sectors). Again, young men were paid more than young women, in part this is because young men were able to work longer hours.

Exploring young men's underachievement

For young men, shorter spells of unemployment and movements into employment were associated with:

- *Living with a parent or relative (who was not a spouse/partner)* - Living at home/with a relative had a profoundly positive influence on young men's chances of securing employment. The majority of

young people lived with parent(s)/relative(s). Unemployed young men living with a parent or relative were 2.3 times more likely to move into work than those who did not. The nature of the support provided by parent(s)/relative(s) – financial, motivational, informational and/or other resources – to young men is unclear.

- *Having vocational qualifications* - Young people with qualifications were more likely to leave unemployment for paid work than those without qualifications. However, there was a gender difference by type of qualification that may reflect the kind of occupation traditionally entered by young men and women. Young men with vocational qualifications were 1.69 times and young women with academic qualifications were 2.59 times more likely to leave unemployment for a job than were their peers without these qualifications. Vocational qualifications may be more important to young men, because on leaving unemployment a quarter (23 per cent) were plant and machine operators, whilst a third (30 per cent) of young women had clerical and secretarial posts and a further quarter (28 per cent) had employment in personal and protective services where academic qualifications might be more important.
- *Having no health problems affecting ability to work* - Young men with no health problems were twice as likely to leave unemployment for a job as were those with a medical condition that affected their work. In general, young people were healthy, however, the incidence of ill health is higher amongst unemployed 18-24 year olds. One in five unemployed young men (19 per cent) and women (21 per cent) experienced health problems.
- *Possessing a driving licence* - Having a driving licence conferred an advantage to both genders. Possessing a driving licence increased the likelihood of young men leaving unemployment and finding work by 1.98 times and young women by 2.2 times. Why possessing a driving licence is influential is, however, less clear. It could simply reflect that employers want young people with driving licences, or it could be a proxy measure for some competency, socio-economic and/or motivational factor(s).

- *Previous work experience* - Young men with previous work experience were 2.15 times more likely to sign off and obtain employment than other young men. Conversely having a history of previous unemployment nearly halved the chances of a young woman moving off the unemployment register (0.58). Of those registered unemployed, young men were the least likely to have enjoyed a period of steady employment or, more generally, strong links with the labour market.

The key factors associated with staying on in full-time education and labour market outcomes, following the completion of compulsory schooling, were the educational attainment of the young people and whether their mothers possessed educational qualifications. Those young men with GCSE A-C grades were, as might be expected, more likely to stay on in full-time education than to be in work. Good GCSE grades also reduced the risk of unemployment for young men by a factor of 0.29 for each A-C grade.

Those young men with mothers with no educational qualifications were more likely to participate in a government training scheme than remain in full-time education. This may, however, be a proxy indicator for a lack of parental support for young men's continuation in full-time education. Again, the research emphasises the importance of parental involvement in influencing young men's labour market outcomes.

Conclusion

The research highlights those young men most at risk of underachieving in the labour market. In terms of unemployment, the most vulnerable young men included those with one or more of the following traits: single men not living with their parent(s)/relative(s); those lacking educational qualifications; having health problems which affect their ability to undertake work; not possessing a driving licence; having no previous work experience; and having a parent (mother) with no formal educational qualifications.

The future prospects for young men in the labour market are uncertain. This is because too many of the factors impinging on their labour market outcomes are unknown. Nevertheless, the underlying trend, whereby successive cohorts of young men were more likely to encounter unemployment on entering the labour market and/or subsequently during their working history, is likely to continue.

Policy implications

The research provides a valuable context to the New Deal for Young People. It highlights the extent of the 'problem' to be addressed and the existence of a sub-group of young men whose participation in the labour market is problematic. Measures that could be taken to help this group include:

- assisting those young men who wish to live with their parent(s)/relative(s) to do so by providing financial and other support to families;
- using the Careers Service to target education and training resources on vulnerable young people and to encourage parents with no formal educational qualifications to re-engage in education and training; and
- using health professionals and schools to target health education programmes at young men.

The study also highlights a need for further research on why young men with driving licences were more likely to leave unemployment for employment than other 18- to 24 year-olds. In addition, the extent to which the non-employment options in the New Deal compensate for any lack of any previous work experience and assist young men in subsequently obtaining paid employment needs to be systematically evaluated.

About the study

The research involved the secondary analysis of three large, complementary datasets: the Jobseeker's Allowance Claimant Survey, the Family and Working Lives Survey and the British Household Panel Survey. The Family and Working Lives Survey provides data on previous generations of young men, and all three surveys provide information on young people's work and educational experiences during the mid-1990s.

How to get further information

The full report, **Work and young men** by Bruce Stafford, Claire Heaver, Karl Ashworth, Charlotte Bates, Robert Walker, Steve McKay and Heather Trickey, is published for the Foundation by YPS (ISBN 1 902633 19 9, price £13.95 plus £2 p&p) as part of the Work and Opportunity series.