

Summary Research Report

A study of the situation of rural men in South Kerry

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South Kerry Development Partnership Limited supports this project under the Social Inclusion Programme 2000-2003.

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1. Introduction

The main objective of this study is to paint a picture of the position of men aged 45 years or more living in South Kerry. As a result of this it is hoped that South Kerry Partnership can draw up programmes to help men in this age group.

The area included in the study is the South Kerry Development Partnership area outside of Killarney Town.

The men were examined in two age groups 45 to 64 years, and 65 years or more. Both married and single men took part in the study.

A number of different ways were used to find out about the men's situation. These were examining statistics, contacting groups around the country who worked with men, and carrying out interviews with individuals and groups in South Kerry.

Individual and group interviews were carried out. Discussions were held with groups of men in the 45 to 64 age group through FAS schemes (Killorglin and Glencar) and a Local Employment Service Job club (Cahersiveen). The individual interviews (48 people took part) were held with a range of people in South Kerry who would have contact with or an interest in these men. They included the following:

- **members of community organisations e.g. Community Associations**
- **voluntary organisations e.g. St. Vincent de Paul**
- **South Kerry Development Partnership staff, board and committee members**
- **State agency workers, e.g. the Health Board, Teagasc, VEC, etc.**
- **FAS Community Employment supervisors**

The group discussions and interviews covered the following areas:

- **income and employment**
- **education and training**
- **health**
- **social and leisure activities**
- **recommendations**

The interviews were carried out during the summer of 2002.

2. Information on men aged 45 years and more

The following information is taken from the returns of the 2002 and 1996 Census of Population, and information from other state agencies e.g. the Health Board.

- in 2002 the population of the area was 32,101, this is an increase of 6.8% on the 1996 figures, however some rural areas (particularly Cahersiveen) still experienced population loss
- the number of males in both age groups in South Kerry is well above the average for the Country as a whole
- a large proportion of these men are single (more than a quarter)
- men outnumber women in the 45 years plus age group by more than 900
- the number of men in this age group who finished their formal education at primary level or before is again above the national average
- the number of men aged 65 years or more living alone is above the State average
- according to predictions the number of elderly people in the Southern Health Board area will rise by a fifth from 1996 to 2011
- the number of persons on the live register has increased in the past year in South Kerry, particularly in the Killarney area
- facilities like toilets and sinks were still being installed by the Health Board in older persons homes in 2001
- according to people interviewed during the study the number of people claiming Farm Assist payments is considerably lower than it should be

3. Main Findings of study

3.1 Men aged 45-64 years:

- men in this age group in South Kerry suffer from real disadvantage in terms of falling agricultural incomes, lack of alternative employment, transport difficulties and limited opportunities for socialising and leisure activity
- FAS Community Employment schemes are very important to these men given the decline in farming and the lack of alternative employment opportunities, many of those interviewed expressed concern as to the effect of cutbacks in the numbers on such schemes

- transport difficulties are a major problem in terms of the distances between towns and villages and the lack of public transport
- concern was also expressed regarding ongoing restrictions on the granting of planning permission for houses in rural areas, it was pointed out that this deprives farmers of a potential additional source of income, as well as contributing to the continuing de-population of rural areas
- many of the traditional opportunities for socialising are no longer there, local creameries, fair days, and harvesting are gone and nothing has replaced them. The main social activities for men are going to the pub and GAA matches
- men interviewed expressed an interest in training that would provide practical skills such as stonemasonry, welding, gardening, etc.
- men do not tend to visit Doctors unless very ill, there is a need for greater awareness of the importance of preventative healthcare
- single men are seen as particularly disadvantaged in terms of quality of social life, use of medical services and living conditions, particularly where they are living alone

3.1.1. Main recommendations for men aged 45-64:

- it was recommended that men's groups should be set up through outreach work operating on an individual or small group basis. A dedicated outreach person is required to carry out this work within the Partnership's geographic area, the groups would act as a means by which the men could be consulted and actions designed to meet their needs
- a men's programme could assist in providing information to people regarding their entitlements
- the strongest recommendation by those interviewed is to maintain Community Employment schemes or introduce a similar type programme for men of this age group, the reality is that there is little alternative employment in South Kerry
- partnership work and programmes should concentrate on the 45-64 age group; it is likely that the most effective work can be done with them. This is not to ignore the needs of the older age group (65 years plus)
- national policy should take more account of the men's needs
- more social outlets are required for this and the older age groups of men

3.2 Men aged 65 years plus:

- the importance of having day care facilities in rural areas to provide a social outlet and health service for men in this age group
- the huge barrier of transport in South Kerry, for example it was pointed out that the lack of public transport means that those over 65 cannot use their free travel passes
- the importance of maintaining state services in South Kerry e.g. postal services as a contact point for those living alone
- people need to be aware that the pride and sense of independence of older people can mean there is a reluctance to seek or receive help from other people
- there is generally a lack of information regarding entitlements and a reluctance to apply for them due to fear of attracting the attention of tax and social welfare officials
- the quality of housing is mainly good, however there are some exceptions to this where basic facilities are lacking

3.2.1 Main recommendations for men 65 years and more:

- more day centres should be developed in rural areas so community based social activities can be arranged
- more sheltered housing schemes are required throughout South Kerry
- at National level more funding should be provided for home helps and carers, as they save the State considerable amounts of money
- Government bodies and local voluntary and community organisations should work closely together when helping men in this age group
- some transport provision is required (South Kerry Development Partnership are presently working on this) as lack of public transport is a huge issue in South Kerry
- Government programmes should be more flexible when dealing with country areas as the nature of poverty is different and less obvious than in urban areas