

Mental Health and Coronavirus – July 2020

Before the Covid outbreak, approximately 1 in 4 people in the UK were experiencing a mental health problem¹. In December 2019 we launched a mental health support campaign as a response to a survey which showed that **almost 1 in 3 of our clients reported suffering from mental health issues.** This report looks at how Covid has impacted mental health and what it might mean for some of our clients.

Mental health and Debt

Covid has resulted in many people being placed on furlough, made redundant or given reduced hours. This in turn has led to reduced income, reliance on benefits and increased debts. **The number of people claiming out-of-work benefits in East Herts has rocketed by 258% during the coronavirus crisis².** Findings for East Herts shows how there has been a shocking rise in unemployment post-coronavirus, increasing from 1,135 in March 2020 to 3,995 in May.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has reported that families who were in poverty pre-crisis are around 50% more likely to have lost their jobs than those not in poverty³. **Individuals with long-term mental health issues are often overrepresented in low-paying, part-time and temporary work⁴.** A recent report by the Resolution Foundation⁵ highlights that those with lower wealth and income are more likely to be in the sectors which suffered a shutdown during coronavirus. The FCA's latest analysis states that "We are aware that not all consumers struggling with debt are receiving help. This is partly due to the lack of capacity in the market to meet the demand and the impact of coronavirus (Covid-19) has exacerbated this issue. It is estimated that the number of people needing advice will climb for the next 18 months – potentially increasing by over 60% and peaking around the end of 2021 (source: Money and Pensions Service)."

These **financial hardships can have largely detrimental effects on individual's mental health, with many people struggling with mental health problems also finding it more difficult to deal with debt problems.** In March, key statistics for client numbers within Citizens Advice East Herts showed a significant increase in clients seeking help with universal credit (up 26%) and employment issues (40%). This comes as many businesses are forced to cut numbers of staff, such as Ryanair, Stansted Airport's biggest airline, who said in March they will be cutting their capacity by 80%, whilst the company that owns the airport itself was

¹ MIND: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/statistics-and-facts-about-mental-health/how-common-are-mental-health-problems/#one>

² <https://www.bishopsstortfordindependent.co.uk/news/coronavirus-behind-258-rise-in-out-of-work-benefits-claimants-in-east-herts-9113685/>

³ Proposal for a Hertfordshire Economic Recovery Team

⁴ <https://www.moneyandmentalhealth.org/income-coronavirus/>

⁵ <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/rainy-days/>

looking into implementing temporary jobs, reduced hours, pay cuts and forcing annual leave in the face of the pandemic⁶.

According to estimates produced by Money and Mental Health Policy Institute, 100,000 people in problem debt in England attempted suicide last year⁷. Moreover, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation also found that **two-thirds of families said that concerns about money had had an impact on their mental health, with around a quarter reporting a severe impact⁸.** This shows how severely debt and money problems can affect a person's mental health, and with more economic strain hitting masses of people due to coronavirus and lockdown, it is clear that this will have worrying implications.

Mental Health and Young People

Findings of a survey carried out at the start of April showed that **young people (18-24-year-olds) were most at risk of experiencing loneliness since lockdown.** Before lockdown one in six (16%) felt lonely, which almost tripled to 44% since lockdown began⁹. **Before lockdown, suicide was the third leading cause of death in 15-19-year olds¹⁰, and with the increased uncertainty, anxiety and fear, there may be worrying increases in this number.** A survey carried out on young people with a history of mental health needs between Friday 20th March (when schools closed for most children) and Wednesday 25th March (when there had been further tightening of restrictions) showed that 32% agreed it had made their mental health 'much worse' and 51% 'a bit worse'. Many highlighted worries over their family's health, and school or university closures. Moreover, **26% said that they were no longer able to access mental health support¹¹.**

Mental Health and Frontline Workers

Health and care workers and other frontline workers are at a greater risk of developing mental health problems as a result of Covid. In a recent survey of its membership, the British Medical Association found that 44% described experiencing depression, anxiety, stress, burnout or other mental health conditions relating to, or made worse, by their work¹². Previous studies after the SARs outbreak found that 10% of health staff had PTSD as well as other signs of psychological distress, highlighting the impact these pandemics can have. The NHS itself launched a mental health hotline as part of a package of measures to support its 1.4 million staff members¹³.

⁶ <https://www.bishopsstortfordindependent.co.uk/news/coronavirus-stansted-set-to-bring-in-temporary-job-and-pay-cuts-9102931/>

⁷ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-52893923>

⁸ Proposal for a Hertfordshire Economic Recovery Team

⁹ <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus/managing-feelings-about-lockdown-easing/>

¹⁰ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health>

¹¹ https://youngminds.org.uk/media/3708/coronavirus-report_march2020.pdf

¹² https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0165178120305163?casa_token=iUExslLigmMAAAAA:P6I83NB1wwOoTYUKt7DytKuZ0I9EPOYEvpdY8tg2VXq3f7W_wSN-PELxJ93O4gpRMZbNAwC6dw

¹³ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/2020/04/nhs-launches-mental-health-hotline-for-staff-tackling-covid-19/>

Mental Health Services and Covid

With restrictions in place for many services, this has affected the way many access medical aid, including GP's, medicine and carers. Rethink Mental Illness and many other mental health charities have reiterated that services such as the NHS and prescriptions can still be accessed ¹⁴, however there have been obstacles to these such as long queues at pharmacies, changes to GP access and anxiety of risk of infection in places such as A&E.

Conclusion

Overall, mental health problems are clearly heightened or triggered by lockdown or other circumstances caused by Covid, such as loss of loved ones, break of routine, isolation and economic problems. This is especially prevalent in young people and frontline workers, such as NHS staff. It is **important that there is increased focus on mental health during this time, with strategies in place to ensure all services for mental illness are accessible. More support and advice will be needed to help people with their debt problems caused by the impact of Covid, especially where pre-existing mental health issues mean they find it difficult to resolve the problems themselves.** We have fundraised for a **new money advice casework team to help with this.** With physical health at such risk, is it important not to overlook mental wellbeing during lockdown, as well as taking preventative action to stop the risk of serious mental health consequences of this pandemic that may persist long into the future.

For local support on mental health:

Herts Mind Network - <https://www.hertsmindnetwork.org/>

¹⁴ Rethink Mental Illness: <https://www.rethink.org/news-and-stories/blogs/2020/03/covid-19-advice-for-people-severely-affected-by-mental-illness-carers/>