



## Factfile 1

# Mental health and employment

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Multiple disadvantage remains a significant problem in the UK. Government estimates that over five million people suffer from multiple disadvantages and 3.7 million do so persistently. Poor mental health, poor housing, worklessness and income poverty are all indicators of multiple disadvantage.<sup>1</sup>

#### **MENTAL ILL HEALTH IN THE WORKING POPULATION**

At any one time, one in three people of working age in the UK is likely to be experiencing some kind of mental distress or mental health problem. One in six adults of working age in the UK experiences some symptom of mental distress (sleeplessness, irritability, worry) that does not meet the criteria for a diagnosis of mental ill health but can affect their ability to work.<sup>2</sup>

One in six of the working-age population experiences symptoms that meet the criteria for a clinical diagnosis of anxiety and/or depression. One in 100 working age adults have symptoms that meet the criteria for a diagnosis of a mental health condition such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. Whilst these may have some impact upon the person's ability to work, the stigma and discrimination experienced is often a greater barrier.<sup>2</sup>

#### **MENTAL HEALTH AND EMPLOYMENT**

A total of 1.18 million people in the UK are in contact with secondary mental health services. Of these, 136,000 have a serious mental health condition and may require support to gain and keep paid employment.<sup>3</sup>

Employment is good for mental health and well-being. Lack of work is detrimental to health and well-being.<sup>4,5</sup>

Re-employment leads to improvement in health and well-being; further unemployment leads to deterioration in health and well-being.<sup>4</sup>

Housing is critical for people to work and to take part in society.<sup>6</sup>

There is no evidence that work is harmful to the mental health of people with serious mental health conditions.<sup>5</sup>

#### **MENTAL HEALTH AND UNEMPLOYMENT**

People who are unemployed consult their GPs more often than the general population.<sup>4</sup> Depression and anxiety are 4-10 times more prevalent among people who have been unemployed for more than 12 weeks.<sup>4</sup>

A total of 2.3 million people with mental health conditions are on benefits or out of work. 1.3 million of these have a serious and enduring mental health condition.<sup>3</sup>

Mental ill health is the most common reason for claiming health-related benefits; some 42% of the 2.6 million people claiming health-related unemployment benefits are doing so primarily because of a mental health condition. Many others have a secondary mental health condition that contributes to their inability to work or return to the workplace.<sup>1,2</sup>

**Estimated employment rates (over 16 hrs/week) for people with mental health conditions (NHS Information Centre)<sup>3</sup>**

|  |        |
|--|--------|
| Whole economy working-age employment rate                | 72.5%  |
| People with any disability                               | 47.5%  |
| People with any mental illness                           | 13.5%  |
| People receiving secondary mental health care and on CPA | 3.4% * |

Annual growth rate in mental health-related unemployment benefit claims since 2000 is 5.4% compared with 0.8% for total incapacity benefits claimants.<sup>7</sup>

An estimated 86–90% of people with mental health conditions who are not in employment want to work.<sup>3</sup>

Unemployment relating to mental ill health tends to be longer lasting than other health-related unemployment: 86% of people claiming health-related benefits for mental health reasons do so for longer than three months; the comparable figure for other health-related benefits claimants is 76%.<sup>2</sup>

Unemployment is detrimental to mental health; the longer someone is unemployed, the more vulnerable they are to depression, anxiety and suicide.<sup>2</sup>

The longer a person is out of work, the less chance they have of getting back into the labour market.<sup>2</sup>

Social disadvantage (including low income, poor educational attainment, homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse, a history of offending) is associated with mental ill health and unemployment.<sup>2</sup>

**STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION IN THE WORKPLACE**

Many people with mental health conditions feel discriminated against in their workplace.<sup>4</sup>

More than one in four people think that someone with a mental health condition should not have the same rights to a job as anyone else.<sup>2</sup>

Fewer than four in ten employers would consider recruiting someone with a declared mental health condition; 62% would consider recruiting someone with a physical disability.<sup>2</sup>

Almost two out of three people who have received hospital treatment for a mental health condition say they have experienced discrimination at work or when trying to get employment.<sup>2</sup>

Mental health conditions considerably increase the risk of leaving employment compared with other health conditions.<sup>4</sup>

Employees returning from a period of sick leave due to a mental health condition, as opposed to a physical health condition, are more likely to be demoted or placed under greater supervision.<sup>4</sup>

People with mental health conditions find it more difficult to find work because employers believe that they will not do the job well.<sup>4</sup>

However, 85% of employers who do employ people with mental health conditions do not regret doing so.<sup>4</sup>

## References

- 1 HM Government (2010). State of the nation report: poverty, worklessness and welfare dependency in the UK. London: Cabinet Office.
- 2 Department for Work and Pensions/Department of Health (2009). Working Our Way to Better Mental Health: A framework for action. London.
- 3 HM Government (2009). Work, Recovery and Inclusion. London.
- 4 Royal College of Psychiatrists (2008). Mental Health and Work. London.
- 5 Waddell G & Burton AK (2006). Is work good for your health and well-being? Norwich: The Stationery Office.
- 6 Warnes A, Crane M, Whitehead N, Fu R (2003). Homelessness Fact file. London: Crisis.
- 7 Government Office for Science (2008). Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project: Final project report. London.

\* 3.4% is the 08/09 figure based upon a 30% completion rate of the MHMDS. This figure is anticipated to be closer to 10%, and the 09/10 data, to be published Summer 2010, should provide a more accurate figure.



## National Mental Health Development Unit

The National Mental Health Development Unit (NMH DU) is the agency charged with supporting the implementation of mental health policy in England by the Department of Health in collaboration with the NHS, Local Authorities and other major stakeholders.

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