

# **Mental Health: Exploring the Current Landscape Recommendations**

## Current Context on Mental Health

### **1. Issue: Stigma remains an ongoing issue**

Recommendation: More qualitative research is needed to understand the impact of stigma, and to explore strategies that are used to negate it. Specific groups include women, people living with severe mental illness, those who identify as LGBT+, those with additional disabilities, middle-aged service users and migrants/refugees.

### **2. Issue: Limited crisis support**

Recommendation: The issue of crisis support provision across the UK is concerning. More research is needed here, across multiple sites, to understand the impact from both service user and service provider perspectives. Such research is crucial to inform policy and to identify appropriate and sustainable solutions.

## Rural Mental Health

### **3. Issue: Limited knowledge on rural mental health**

Recommendation: More research is needed generally on rural mental health but also specifically to understand the processes of inclusion and exclusion (and a more detailed look at gendered dimensions), as a way to inform policies that maximise the former.

## COVID- 19

### **4. Issue: COVID-19 has widened inequalities in mental health across gender and age groups, and exacerbated pre-existing inequalities.**

Recommendation: More qualitative research is needed to understand the impact of COVID-19 on young people, women, and existing service users – in order to inform long-term interventions that are effective and context-specific.

### **5. Issue: COVID-19 has been challenging for rural marginalised communities**

Recommendation: To continue to build on the current evidence base with more in-depth work within each of these communities. Additionally, research exploring mental health and wellbeing specific digital technologies as part of a

viable solution to lockdowns, social distancing and remote engagement is recommended.

## Structural Inequalities and the Cumulative Effects of Disadvantage

### **6. Issue: Poverty remains one of the most significant social determinants of health and mental health**

Recommendation: given the increasing levels of poverty, research is needed to evaluate the most effective and sustainable solutions that can help individuals and families find their way out of the 'poverty trap'. Interventions should prioritise human wellbeing and thriving as part of their aim; the type of work a person has is just as important to their wellbeing as simply having a job.

### **7. Issue: The impact of poverty on mental health is not well evidenced in rural areas**

Recommendation: More qualitative work is needed to understand the impact of poverty and its influence on daily life for service users, how it shapes perceptions of rural community life and the ability to connect with others, and the degree of influence it has on accessing available services. Such evidence is key for informing policies that are appropriate and relevant within a rural context.

### **8. Issue: Scotland has a serious problem with drugs and alcohol consumption**

Recommendation: innovative pilots modelled on international case studies may be helpful in this regard; in particular, therapeutic treatments that specifically deal with the role of trauma in addiction should be considered, and trauma-based therapy should be made freely available, particularly in communities with higher rates of addiction. Additionally, more financial support should be provided to those organisations focused on building social capital and helping those recovering from addiction to build their connections within communities.

### **9. Issue: living in deprived areas leads to significantly worse mental and physical outcomes, including shorter life expectancy.**

Recommendation: More research is needed to understand the relationship between social and economic inequality, and its impact on mental and physical health. Concepts such as 'status anxiety' are particularly useful in this regard for exploring the experiences of those who live in deprived areas. Given the hidden

nature of rural poverty, research in these geographical areas should be prioritised.

**10. Issue: the introduction of neoliberalism has led to significant wealth and income inequality which in turn has disproportionately affected the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, and impacted on overall wellbeing at societal level.**

Recommendation: more research is needed to understand the impact of neoliberalism, i.e. using the theory as part of the research framework, both for existing service users and for the general population.

**11. Issue: neoliberalism has weakened the welfare state and invalidated the experience of mental ill-health.**

Recommendation: further qualitative research that captures the voices of those with lived experience is vital to ensure welfare planning remains true to its original intentions. Additionally, significantly more research is needed to hear from service users about the types of support interventions that could help them access better opportunities in terms of meaningful employment.

### Third Sector

**12. Issue: Covid has put significant pressure on charities in terms of their financial viability**

Recommendation: Needs-assessments are vital to ensure that such organisations do not remain 'at risk' and are supported in their long-term planning to achieve sustainability.

**13. Issue: There is a limited knowledge base on the voluntary sector in rural areas**

Recommendation: More research is needed to explore the impact and contribution that the sector plays in rural areas, particularly with regards to mental health.