



Addressing Student Mental Health

Tuesday 30th January; 10am-11am

Committee Room 20, Houses of Parliament, Westminster, SW1A 0AA

Introduction

Over the course of the last decade, there has been a significant rise in the number of students suffering from mental health difficulties across the whole of tertiary education. Poor mental health amongst students has led to many dropping out of education, as the number of students experiencing anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts has dramatically increased. The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Students is committed to raising the concerns facing students and brings together MPs and Peers across the political spectrum to encourage students to actively participate in politics. This APPG hopes to shed light on the rise of mental health difficulties amongst students and how this has affected their education and future prospects.

Key Statistics

- 95% of higher education providers have reported an increase in demand of counselling services
- Between 2007 and 2015 student suicides have increased by 79% (from 75 to 134)
- Rates of depression and anxiety amongst teenagers has increased by 70% over the last 25 years
- In 2014/15 1,180 students who experienced mental health difficulties dropped out of university, an increase of 210% compared to 2009/10
- An NUS survey (2015) found that 87% of students in both further and higher education have felt stressed; 77% have suffered from anxiety and 33% have had suicidal thoughts.

Triggers

Survey data and research has shown that students are becoming increasingly less happy and more anxious. In particular, in the last 25 years, rates of depression and anxiety amongst teenagers has increased by 70%.¹ In late 2015, The APPG on Students commissioned a poll of over 1,000 students in both higher and further education, which explored how students feel about their mental health and the support they receive. This found that **87 per cent** have felt stress; **77 per cent** have suffered anxiety; and, **69 per cent** have felt depressed in the last year.² We also found that **33 per cent have had suicidal thoughts** – around double the figure (17%) for the general population.³ Of respondents who did not identify as heterosexual, **55% reported suicidal thoughts**.⁴

Whilst there is no exhaustive list of what triggers mental health difficulties for students, a number of studies have provided some insight into the student perspective. Prominent factors include: academic, financial and social pressures; the transition from school to college or university; and the stigma around understanding mental health. Notably, work conducted by YouthSight found that for first-year students at university, 87% find it difficult to cope with social and academic aspects of university life. Students also noted experiencing much stress when studying (around 59%). In addition, 1 in 3 first-year students said that the financial burdens made it difficult for them to cope.⁵

It was also found that many students choose not to disclose a mental health condition to their peers or university staff as they feel their relationships may be adversely affected as a result.⁶ Whilst there has been evidence that the majority of students are sympathetic to those who experience mental health difficulties (84% accept that mental illness is as serious as physical illness), there is still a lack of disclosure. Disclosing such personal information can be perceived as

¹ <https://youngminds.org.uk/media/1233/youngminds-annual-report-15-16-final.pdf>

² <http://appg-students.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/APPG-on-Students-December-Mental-health-briefing.pdf>

³ [Adult psychiatric morbidity in England, 2007 - Results of a household survey](#)

⁴ <http://appg-students.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/APPG-on-Students-December-Mental-health-briefing.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.upp-ltd.com/student-survey/UPP-Student-Experience-Report-2017.pdf>

⁶ https://www.ippr.org/files/2017-09/1504645674_not-by-degrees-170905.pdf



limiting future opportunities for students, with many fearing that they may be subjected to institutional stigma or prejudice from staff.⁷ Similarly, as IPPR note in their report, *Not by Degrees*, stigma can also be associated with socio-economic background and differs amongst demographics. When as many as 90% of young people are reporting experiencing mental health stigma and discrimination, this is a serious barrier to accessing vital services.⁸

Specific further education issues

Whilst there has been much research on higher education and mental health, there has been less so with regard to further education. Research conducted by organisations such as the Association of Colleges have found that there are increasing numbers of students in further education who are experiencing mental health difficulties. The Association of Colleges found that 100% of colleges reported having students diagnosed with depression. A further 99% reported having students diagnosed with severe anxiety, 97% with bipolar disorder and 90% with psychosis.⁹

There are a range of factors within the further education environment that can contribute to feelings of mental distress. The NUS report *Further Education and Mental Health* (2017) found that the key drivers of poor mental health for students in higher education is replicated for those in this sector as well.¹⁰ In particular, a trigger of poor mental health amongst further education students is social media. The most common response amongst students was that social media is unrelenting, and can be accessed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Students discussed how they believe that because social media is often addictive and can be accessed on so many different devices, you are more open to harassment, bullying and trolling at any time of the day. Of students who have been trolled, 28% agree that it has affected their mental health.¹¹

Access to mental health provisions

The growing number of students seeking support from education institutions further illustrates the urgency of addressing students' mental health. Over the last 10 years, the IPPR have noted that there has been a fivefold increase in the number of students reporting mental health conditions to their respective institutions.¹² Since 2011, there has been an increase of 68% in counselling service users at Russell Group universities.¹³ The Nightline Association organisation has also reported a rise in demand for its student-run support services; "calls to teams rose by 96% in Oxford and 147% in Leeds between 2011 and 2015."¹⁴

The purpose of encouraging students to disclose any mental health conditions and other disabilities to further or higher education institutions is to ensure that students can access additional support which they may be entitled to. However, since the cuts to funding programmes such as the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) organisations such as NUS are worried that many students will struggle to access technological help and non-medical assistance.¹⁵ A survey conducted by Student Minds found that students want a range of support options when it comes to mental health. As part of the survey, students cited that there were a number of barriers in accessing treatment such as: limited service provision, long waiting lists and short support sessions.¹⁶

For details of our next event or to receive more information about the APPG on Students, please contact the Secretariat to the APPG on Students: info@appg-students.org.uk.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/further-education-and-mental-health-report>

⁹ <https://www.aoc.co.uk/about-colleges/research-and-stats/surveys-and-research/aoc-surveys>

¹⁰ <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/further-education-and-mental-health-report>

¹¹ Ibid

¹² https://www.ippr.org/files/2017-09/1504645674_not-by-degrees-170905.pdf

¹³ <http://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/STRICTLY-EMBARGOED-UNTIL-22-SEPT-Hepi-Report-88-FINAL.pdf>

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/jan/27/disabled-students-like-me-rely-on-funding-at-university-now-its-been-cut>

¹⁶ http://www.studentminds.org.uk/uploads/3/7/8/4/3784584/170901_student_voices_report_final.pdf