



In Focus

Children and Mental Health

Overview

On 22 October 2015, the Minister of State for Community and Social Care, Alistair Burt, [announced](#) new plans to improve children and young people's mental health, including a national anti-stigma campaign aimed at teenagers. The measures also included the launch of a 'Youth Mental Health' section on the [NHS website](#), which will help children find information regarding mental health conditions. Further, Mr Burt announced the commissioning of the first national survey of children and young people's mental health since 2004, which will involve 9,500 children, and their parents, teachers and carers. The Minister [stated](#) the results of the survey would enable the Government to "estimate how many children in the population are living with a mental health condition", and also to examine issues which may lead to mental health issues, such as social pressures and bullying. The results of the survey are expected to be made available in 2018.

Scale of the Issue

The last Government [survey](#) on mental health in children and young people was conducted in 2004, and in 2014 the [House of Commons Health Committee](#) expressed their concern over the lack of official information published on the issue since that date. The Committee [argued](#) that due to a lack of reliable and up to date information about children and young people's mental health, "those planning and running CAMHS [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services] have been operating in a 'fog'".

According to the [survey](#) cited above, approximately one in ten children and young people are affected by a mental health problem. These can range from conduct disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorders, autism spectrum disorders and emotional disorders, such as anxiety and depression. Much of the more recent data available on children's mental health comes from the charitable sector. For example, in 2014/15, ChildLine report that they provided [counselling services](#) to 286,812 children. Four of the top ten issues reportedly raised by those children related to mental health, including self-harm, suicide, low self-esteem/unhappiness and mental health conditions such as anxiety.

Further, ChildLine estimate that over the 2014/15 period there was a [124 percent increase](#) in the number of counselling sessions where children mentioned difficulties accessing mental health services. Indeed, a recent Freedom of Information request made by the NSPCC [revealed](#) that between March 2014–April 2015 in 35 Mental Health Trusts across England, more than a fifth of children and young people referred to local NHS mental health services were reportedly rejected from receiving treatment. The organisation [found](#) that out of 186,453 cases, approximately 39,652 children did not receive help. The NSPCC's findings [indicated](#) that, where reasons were given for not offering a mental health service

to a child or young person, it was often because it was deemed the child “did not meet the high clinical threshold to qualify for treatment at a CAMHS”.

Impact on Health and Education

A 2012 [report](#) by the United Kingdom’s Chief Medical Officer found that mental health problems in children and young people often last into adulthood, and that there was also “[well-identified increased physical health problems associated with mental health](#)”. Further, the report [claimed](#) that there were “[strong links](#)” between mental health problems and social disadvantage, arguing that children and young people living in the poorest households were three times more likely to have mental health problems than those “[growing up in better-off homes](#)”. The Chief Medical Officer [estimated](#) that the costs associated with mental health problems in children and young people ranged between £11,030 and £59,130 annually, per child. These estimates take into account the treatment costs borne directly by the family, and also to agencies connected to education, social services and youth justice.

In July 2015, Key—an organisation that provides management support to schools—surveyed 1,180 school leaders in England about their concerns regarding pupil wellbeing. Their findings [revealed](#) that 67 percent of those surveyed were most concerned with their pupils’ mental health. Similarly, a 2014 [survey](#) by the mental health discrimination group, Time to Change, concerning approximately 3,000 people who had experienced mental health problems whilst in education, found that 54 percent of correspondents believed a mental health problem “[had an impact on their education](#)”. Further, more than one in ten people surveyed (12 percent) stated that their mental health problem “[put a stop to \[their\] education all together](#)”.

The relationship between education and mental health was a central focus of the 2014 House of Commons Health Committee report cited above, which contended that schools had “enormous potential to help address emerging mental health issues in children and young people”. As a result, the Committee made a number of [recommendations](#) to the Department for Education, including: the introduction of a mandatory module on mental health in teacher training; that an audit should be conducted of mental health provision and support within schools; and better liaising with young people, including those who have mental health problems, to ensure that mental health is added to the curriculum and developed “in a way that best meets their needs”. In January 2015, the Government issued its [response](#) to the Health Committee’s report, which stated that improving child and adolescent mental health was a “key priority”, and to that end funding had been directed toward developing guidance for teachers on mental health, and that the Department for Education was working with experts in school counselling to prepare advice on “securing high quality counselling” in schools.

Further Information

- House of Commons Health Committee, [Children’s and Adolescents’ Mental Health and CAMHS](#), 5 November 2014, HC 342 of session 2014–15; and [Government Response to the Committee’s Third Report of Session 2014–15](#), 10 February 2015, HC 1036 of session 2014–15
- House of Commons Library, [Children and Young People’s Mental Health—Policy, CAMHS Services, Funding and Education](#), 20 May 2015, CBP-7196

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