

Mental health charity warns of “nightmare scenario” for North East England

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22 December 2012

Evidence has emerged of the mounting mental health crisis engulfing the North East of England as a consequence of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government’s drive to implement the demands of the world financial markets.

A recent report authored by the Health and Social Care Information Centre reveals that when compared to the London area, the North East, the poorest region in the UK, has almost three times the rate of self-harm/attempted suicide hospital admissions.

Nationally, 110,960 cases were recorded during the 12 months to August 2012, a 0.4 percent rise on the previous year. Nearly 90 percent of cases were the result of self-poisoning. Some 7.6 percent were the result of injuries caused through sharp objects and 3 percent a result of injuries relating to attempted hangings, drowning and firearms, as well as jumping from buildings. Nearly 60 percent of the hospital admissions were for women.

Statistics relating to the North East region showed that for the same period, 8,560 admissions were recorded by regional hospitals, with former industrial and mining areas such as Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Stockton, North Yorkshire and York witnessing even higher increases.

Lyn Boyd, chief executive of Mental Health North East, warned of “a nightmare scenario” facing the region. He explained that the North East had higher rates of hospital admission for depression, high death rates from suicide, high levels of household expenditure on gambling repayments and higher consumption of alcohol and the highest percentage of adults with a life-limiting long-term illness.

Boyd declared, “One of the forgotten impacts of recession is a rise in the number of people with mental health problems.... Cutbacks in health and social care,

benefits and welfare reforms are having a hugely negative impact on the mental health of so many vulnerable people. Then, just when they need help most, mental health services are also under threat.”

Other charities have also reported a surge in mental health problems across the UK and increasing problems with funding. Chief Executive Marjorie Wallace, of SANE, a charity providing services and hotlines on behalf of the mentally ill, criticised the cuts to psychiatric services at the same time as numbers of people with mental illness are rising disturbingly, saying, “At SANE we are already living with the serious consequences that recession can have, particularly for people already close to the edge. There is an atmosphere of increased fear and a lack of certainty, triggering people into anxiety and depression.”

“There has been a marked increase in the number of people contacting us with enduring mental health problems who are deeply fearful about unemployment, reduced benefits and debt. Equally worrying, we are receiving requests for help and support from people with little or no previous contact with mental health services who are finding their financial problems are making them ill,” Wallace added.

The mental health charity Mind has reported a big surge in calls to its help lines since the start of the recession in 2008, with the number of people having personal finance and employment problems doubling during that period. The charity said that 40 percent of calls were going unanswered because of the increase in demand.

Mind chief executive Paul Farmer said, “The era of austerity shows little sign of abating and more and more people need our help. At the same time the local Mind network is facing the challenging situation of

increased demand for services and potential cuts to funding.”

The government has ordered cuts of £50 million to Mental Health Foundation Trusts in England, leading to the closure of clinics and day centres and a cull of jobs. West London Mental Health NHS Trust is cutting its workforce by 10 percent—the equivalent of more than 450 full-time posts—by 2013, and Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership NHS Trust, which concentrates on mental health, is cutting the equivalent of nearly 560 full-time posts—almost 20 percent.

Local authorities are also slashing budgets, with more than 2,000 charities and community groups having their funding cut and, in some cases, stopped. A survey carried out by the charity Young Minds found that more than half of health trusts and councils had cut their budgets for children and young people’s mental health services this year. Of particular concern were the numbers of specialist workers in schools, such as nurses, that had been made redundant in a situation where three children in every classroom have a diagnosable mental health condition.

Other indicators show the growing social devastation taking place across the North East. A recent report, “It Shouldn’t Happen Here,” published by Save the Children, uncovered evidence that the region “has one of the highest rates of child poverty in the country, particularly places like Middlesbrough, Sunderland and South Tyneside” with some 200,000 children living below the poverty line. In November, the *Northern Echo* reported on “an explosion in demand for soup kitchens” in the North East as a result of the “growing crisis among families who cannot afford to eat.” The gross disposable household income of residents in the North East is 15 percent below the UK average, and the average full time wage is £451, lower than the UK average of £501.

The UK unemployment rate is highest in the North East (9.5 percent) compared to the lowest in the South West (5.7 percent). Nearly a quarter of all workers are classified as “inactive”. Among 18-24-year-olds, the number of long-term unemployed increased fivefold during the year to June 2012 from 3.4 percent to nearly 20 percent. The North East has been particularly affected because of the destruction of its manufacturing base in the 1980s and 1990s, and now the slashing of tens of thousands of public-sector jobs the region

became dependent upon.



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