

National and international research shows rates of mental health problems are higher among those who are unemployed.⁶ On average, 34 per cent of unemployed people experience psychological problems, compared to 16 per cent of those employed.⁷ Men and blue collar workers experience more distress due to unemployment than women and white collar workers. Anxiety and depression are the most common mental health problems.

The reality of job loss can create a personal crisis that can lead to sadness, anxiety and a sense of helplessness
(Te Rōpū Rangahau Hauora A Eru Pōmare, 2000).

The higher rate of mental health problems among unemployed people increases the risk of suicide.⁸ The likelihood of death by suicide is greater among younger men.

For those in work, job insecurity, excessive workloads and time pressures can adversely impact on mental wellbeing.⁹

Signs and symptoms of anxiety and depression

- Feeling worried, fearful, nervous, a lack of control.
- Irritable, physically aroused.
- Difficulties concentrating and sleeping.
- Feeling sad, unmotivated, tired, worthless or hopeless.

The current economic environment is impacting on children and families. A number of Asian migrant men hit by the recession are moving back overseas, leaving their wives and children behind. An *Every Child Counts* summit in September 2009 looked at the recession’s impact on children and already poor families.

Young people who attended the summit... told us that home life is becoming more difficult because of financial stress
(Every Child Counts, 2009).

A new initiative, the Children’s Social Health Monitor, will monitor the impact of the economic downturn on children’s wellbeing.¹⁰

IMPACT ON SERVICES

Community services such as the Salvation Army and Lifeline have raised concerns about the increasing number of people accessing services due to financial pressure.

Salvation Army figures indicate a:

- 31 per cent increase in budgeting advice
- 45 per cent rise in food assistance
- 52 per cent increase in counselling
- 45 per cent of new clients negatively affected by gambling
- 21 per cent increase in admissions to an intensive alcohol and drug addiction programme.

Any 12-month mental disorder among adults	
• General population	20.7%
• Younger people [‡]	28.6%
• Lower household income ⁺	27.6%
• More deprived areas	26.3%
• Māori [†]	29.5%
• Pacific [†]	24.4%

[†] Attributed in part to younger age, sex, lower education and income
[‡] Aged 16-24 years. ⁺ Under half of the median equivalised household income. Source: *Te Rau Hinengaro*, 2006.

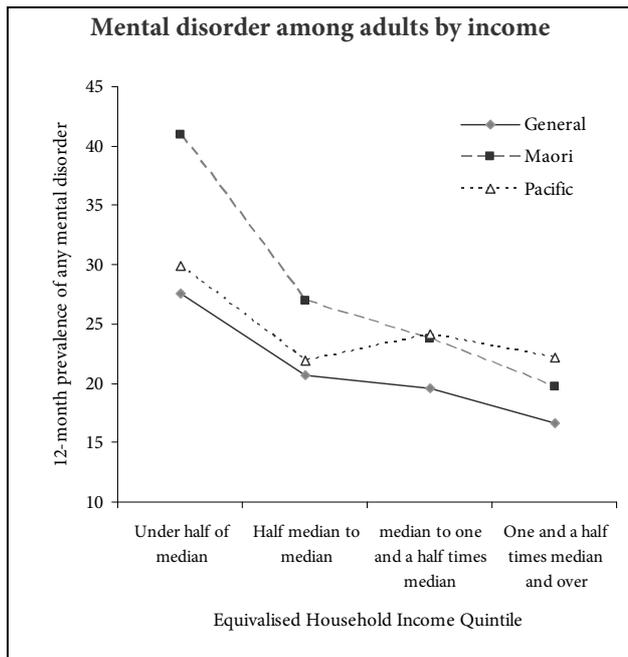
⁶ Fergusson, Horwood & Lynskey (1997), Fergusson Horwood & Woodward (2001).

⁷ Paul & Moser (2009).

⁸ Blakely, Collings & Atkinson (2003), Beautrais, Joyce & Mulder, (1998), Stuckler, Basu, Suhrcke, Coutts & McKee (2009)

⁹ Sverke, Hellgren & Naswall (2002) and Melchior, Caspi, Milne, Danese, Poulton & Moffitt (2007)

¹⁰ <http://dnmeds.otago.ac.nz/departments/womens/paediatrics/research/nzcyes/index.html>



Source: *Te Rau Hinengaro*, 2006.

The Lowdown youth depression brief intervention service, www.thelowdown.co.nz, has seen access increase by 22% compared to last year. For the 12 months ending June 2009 there were 116,547 website visits and 118,858 texts.

Counselling and psychological services, primary health care providers, and mental health services are reporting anecdotal evidence of an increased demand due to financial factors for anxiety and depression.

Antidepressant medication use has increased. Pharmac reported a record 1.2 million prescriptions for antidepressants issued last year costing \$20.8 million.¹¹

At the same time the need for support is increasing, community services and non-profit organisations are experiencing greater difficulties in securing funding from community charities and trusts. A review by the New Zealand Drug Foundation highlights the potential risk of some services being cut back due to financial pressures.

What may emerge during a recession then is a double edge sword scenario whereby service providers confront the prospect of diminishing resources together with increased demand (New Zealand Drug Foundation, May 2009).

Public health spending is currently being reviewed. Chairman of the Mental Health Commission, Peter McGeorge, has warned of the major negative impact that would arise if district health boards diverted existing mental health service resources to other areas of health.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

In August 2009 a \$152 million stimulus package was announced, directed toward youth unemployment and creating work, education, and training programmes. Such strategies will contribute to reducing the risk of mental health problems among younger people.

In the May 2009 budget an additional \$5.3 million was invested in the development of primary mental health initiatives, bringing the total for direct service delivery to \$24.4 million. These primary mental health initiatives aim to provide support to people with mild to moderate mental health and substance use disorders.

Health is the single largest area of public spending, with \$12.4 billion being spent in 2009, around 6.9 per cent of gross domestic profit (GDP) or 20 per cent of Crown expenditure. A Ministerial Review Group report released in August 2009 outlined recommendations on improving the quality and performance of the public health system and frontline services.

Meeting the Challenge recommended structural changes to reduce waste and bureaucracy, improve safety and quality, and enhance clinical and financial viability, including:

- transferring the planning and funding of national services to a Crown Health Funding Agency
- regional planning by district health boards
- a National Health Committee to assess the appropriateness and cost effectiveness of new and existing services.

¹¹ Compared to 700,000 prescriptions in 2002

In restructuring and reviewing the health sector, mental health service provision needs to remain a priority, especially for high risk groups:

- unemployed people and those under financial pressure are at risk of mental health problems
- mental health problems have a similar level of disability as physical health problems
- providing mental health and addiction services can reduce flow on effects to other sectors.¹²

To improve the quality of mental health services:

- research is required to better understand effective interventions and prioritise programmes
- the development a national quality plan has been recommended.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SERVICES

Strategies recommended for services to cope with rising demand in the current economic environment include:

- identifying and improving inefficient processes
- assessing the quality of service delivery, such as outcome measurement, readmission rates, and treatment effectiveness
- using information to invest in quality and cost effective services
- organisational support for learning and sharing of innovative ideas to enhance service delivery
- collaboration between services to maximise the use of resources
- integration and consolidation of services.

The Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector website, www.ocvs.gov.nz, has practical ideas for community groups including reviewing volunteer programs, managing costs and diversifying income sources.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS

Job insecurity and financial pressure may increase the risk of mental health problems among workers. Resources and organisations offering practical assistance and support are available to assist employees – see individual support.

HisBiz is a new initiative by Workwise Employment Agency and the Waikato Chamber of Commerce, offering support to businessmen. HisBiz is hosting events like 'Blokcs Breakfasts' in the Waikato region and creating a website targeting men following discussions on the impact of the recession on businessmen. Visit the Workwise news page at www.workwise.org.nz or email theguys@hisbiz.co.nz for more information.

INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT

A brochure offering practical advice on coping with financial stress is available from the Ministry of Health at www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/indexmh/coping-with-financial-stress.

Budgeting advice is available from Family Budgeting Services (www.familybudgeting.org.nz or freephone 0508 283 438). Individual support, advice and advocacy is available from the Citizen's Advice Bureau (www.cab.org.nz or freephone 0800 367 222).

Information on depression is available from the Mental Health Foundation, including a brochure on depression for men. Visit www.mentalhealth.org.nz.

¹² Estimates suggest every dollar spent on addiction treatment programmes reduces the cost of drug related crime by \$4 to \$7.

Further sources of information and support

Depression helpline

Freephone 0800 111 757

www.depression.org.nz

Helping people understand depression and find a way through.

Lowdown website

Text 5626

www.thelowdown.co.nz

Website, text and message board that helps young people understand depression.

Lifeline

Phone (09) 522 2999 (Auckland) or freephone 0800 543 354

www.lifeline.org.nz

Free 24/7 confidential counselling and support service.

Mensline

Freephone 0800 636 754

www.mensline.org.nz

Free confidential telephone service tailored to meet the needs of men.

Youthline

Freephone 0800 376 633

Text 234

Email: talk@youth.co.nz

Free 24/7 confidential support for young people.

You can also talk to your general practitioner or telephone your local mental health services available through your district health board.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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A full list of references and resources is available on request.

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