

House of Commons Debate on Women's Mental Health

House of Commons
3 October 2019



Key Messages

- For many people, mental ill health may be the cause or effect of a wider set of issues within their lives. This could include relationship break-downs, domestic violence, homelessness or housing difficulties, missed education opportunities, unemployment, financial difficulties, debt, ill health, substance misuse and interaction with the criminal justice system. Councils have a unique role in making the links between these sets of issues and can tackle the underlying causes, rather than waiting to deal with an individual crisis.
- Councils across the country are doing all they can to safeguard and protect women and girls from all forms of harm. We support a public health approach to tackling serious violent crime against women and girls, which is a key contributor to poor mental health.
- Interventions require the input of a range of partners, including those in the health and education sectors, as opposed to relying solely on a criminal justice strategy. This means there needs to be greater investment in cost-effective early intervention and prevention schemes that help stop violence and abuse occurring in the first place.
- Councils are on the frontline of identifying and tackling harmful practices against women, including FGM. The National FGM Centre is an initiative jointly run by the LGA and Barnardo's which is working to help fulfil the Government's pledge to end FGM in the UK by 2030.
- Over half of all mental ill health starts before the age of 14, with 75 per cent of mental health disorders starting by 24 years of age. Children and young people's chances of thriving dramatically increase the earlier we provide help as well as saving money in the longer term. Councils strive to make sure that every child gets the best start and is able to go on and live a healthy, safe and prosperous life, despite seeing more than 560 cases of children coming into care because of mental health issues affecting either them or their family. This is an increase of more than 50 per cent in just four years.¹
- A quarter of young women aged 17 to 19 have a mental health disorder. Half of them have self-harmed or attempted to take their own life. Suicide prevention is a public health priority for local government and every council has a suicide prevention plan in place.

Briefing

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Further information

The importance of mental health support

Good mental health is essential for a healthy and prosperous society. Unfortunately, it is easier to focus on what happens when a person becomes mentally ill, and how the health service intervenes, rather than how to keep our communities mentally well in the first place. It is essential to prevent mental health issues arising, intervening early if problems do start surfacing, and helping people manage their lives going forward. It is important that we focus on prevention and intervention at an early stage. By doing this we will help prevent poor mental health blighting peoples' lives and improve the well-being of our communities.

It is worrying that so many women today face pressures affecting their mental health and wellbeing. 1 in 4 women aged 17 to 19 have a mental health disorder,² and of these half have self-harmed. Despite having a low number of deaths overall, following a period of relative stability, suicide rates for females aged 10-24 increased by 83 per cent, from 1.8 deaths per 100,000 females (106 deaths) to 3.3 in 2018 (188 deaths).³

For many women, mental ill health may be the cause or effect of a wider set of issues within their lives. This could include relationship break-downs, domestic violence, homelessness or housing difficulties, missed education opportunities, unemployment, financial difficulties, debt, ill health, substance misuse and interaction with the criminal justice system. Councils have a unique role in making the links between these sets of issues and can tackle the underlying causes, rather than waiting to deal with an individual crisis.

Councils strive to make sure that every child gets the best start and is able to go on and live a healthy, safe and prosperous life, despite seeing more than 500 cases of children affected by mental health issues – either themselves, or those around them – every day. This has increased by 50 per cent in 4 years.⁴

Significant funding pressures in council funding, particularly in social services and public health mean many councils are struggling to provide the support people so desperately need. They are also being forced to cut some of the vital early intervention services which can support people with low level mental health issues and avoid more serious problems in later life.

Local government needs the right funding and the right levers to use their position as local leaders, place-shapers, commissioners and deliverers of services across all these areas to really improve the mental health and wellbeing of our community and stop people falling into a mental health crisis.

A key role for joint NHS/local government community mental health services is to support people to regain their place in mainstream activities and opportunities along with everyone. This also includes sufficient availability of 'step down' care and support in the community so that people can live safely in communities and are not faced with long hospital stays, sometimes many miles from their homes.

We support additional funding to target resources to areas experiencing the greatest health inequalities. The NHS needs to work in partnership with local government to tackle health inequalities. We are clear that suicide prevention isn't just a mental health issue – it's everybody's business.

Suicide prevention

Suicide prevention is a public health priority for local government and every council has a suicide prevention plan in place. Councils are already working closely with schools, railway operators, businesses, hospitals and the police to prevent suicide and help those affected by it.

Government funding announced earlier this year to help further strengthen local action to reduce and prevent suicide is a clear endorsement of councils' locally-driven approach and a recognition that by working together and supporting one another, we can reduce rates of suicide and save lives.

We welcome the real terms increase to the Public Health Grant announced in the Spending Round last month. It will provide much-needed investment in council services, including public health.

Public Health

Councils have statutory responsibilities around public health, and as such have a stake in the future arrangements around these areas. There needs to be a greater shift away from health and care investment in treatment and towards prevention. We are pleased that the NHS Long Term Plan recognises this. By joining up care, health, planning, housing, transport, welfare and education, councils have made positive strides in tackling the social determinants of health and wellbeing from early childhood and throughout life.

We must place an emphasis on prevention including, tackling the wide range of determinants that contribute to poor health to improve health and wellbeing, and reducing health inequalities, particularly in mental health.

Mental health problems in the perinatal period are very common, affecting up to 20 per cent of women. Health visitors, a service provided by councils, can play a key role in identifying and supporting new mums who may have mental health concerns.

FGM

Councils are on the frontline of identifying and tackling harmful practices against women, including FGM. The National FGM Centre is an initiative jointly run by the LGA and Barnardo's which is working to help fulfil the Government's pledge to end FGM in the UK by 2030.

Sadly, there have now been more than 20,000 new cases of FGM identified over the past four years which highlights the size of the challenge facing all agencies seeking an end to this form of abuse.⁵ The work of the centre is crucial if the Government is to fulfil its pledge to end FGM in the UK by 2030.

Between September 2015 and March 2019 local authorities have referred 450 cases to the Centre.⁶ It has supported the application of 28 FGM Protection Orders over that time, and is also working to support victims of breast flattening and child abuse linked to faith or belief.

Local leadership

Councils, and in particular councillors as local community leaders, can champion and raise awareness of mental health. The [Mental Health Challenge](#), advocated by the LGA as part of its Bright Futures campaign, is a platform where councillors of different political persuasions across England commit to championing mental health, share ideas, seek advice and receive support with the aim of enhancing the mental health of their local communities.

Children's mental health

Over half of all mental ill health starts before the age of 14, with 75 per cent of mental health disorders starting by 24 years of age. If we are to positively address women's and children's mental health, it is important to focus on prevention and early intervention, which the LGA is calling for through their [Bright Futures](#) campaign.

¹ Councils seeing more than 560 child mental health cases every day', July 2019

<https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/councils-seeing-more-560-child-mental-health-cases-every-day>

² 'One in eight of five to 19 year olds had a mental disorder in 2017 major new survey finds', NHS Digital statistics, November 2018 <https://digital.nhs.uk/news-and-events/latest-news/one-in-eight-of-five-to-19-year-olds-had-a-mental-disorder-in-2017-major-new-survey-finds>

³ Office for National Statistics,

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/suicidesinthekingdom/2018registrations>

⁴ 'Councils seeing more than 560 child mental health cases every day', July 2019

<https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/councils-seeing-more-560-child-mental-health-cases-every-day>

⁵ 'LGA responds to annual FGM figures', July 2019 <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/lga-responds-annual-fgm-figures-0>

⁶ National FGM Centre, 'About Us' <http://nationalfgmcentre.org.uk/about-us/>