



Cross Party Group on Suicide Prevention - sponsored by Jayne Bryant MS

Wednesday 23rd November 2022

12pm – 1.25pm

Via Zoom

Attendee's: Alun Davies (Police Liaison Unit – Welsh Government), Ana Laing (Samaritans), Ana Reis-Rogers (LiSS – Living in Suicide's Shadow), Andrew Jenkins (Welsh Parliament), Briony Hunt (Samaritans), Bryn Morgan (The Jacob Abraham Foundation), Ceri Fowler (Cardiff and Vale University Health Board), Charlotte Knight (Welsh Parliament), Claire Cotter (NHS Wales Health Collaborative), David Mais (ONS), Delyth Jewell MS (Welsh Parliament), Dr Alys Cole-King (4 Mental Health), Dr Bethan Bowden (Aneurin Bevan University Health Board), Emma Gooding (Samaritans), Faith Reynolds (Gwent Police), Gareth Davies (Tir Dewi), George Watkins (Mind Cymru), Ioan Bellin (Welsh Parliament), James Evans MS (Welsh Parliament), Jayne Bryant MS (Welsh Parliament), John Griffiths MS (Welsh Parliament), Laura Frayne (Samaritans), Laura Tranter (Hywel Dda University Health Board), Lauren Revie (ONS), Libby Bradbury, Lynne Neagle MS (Welsh Government), Madelaine Phillips (Welsh NHS Confederation), Maggy Corkhill (Co-alc Alliance), Mathew Norman (Diabetes UK Cymru), Michaela Moore (Mental Health Matters Wales), Olga Sullivan (Samaritans), Phil Sparrow (South Wales Police), Philippa Watkins (Welsh Parliament), Rhys Hughes (Welsh Parliament), Rhys Livesy (Welsh Parliament), Sarah Murphy MS (Welsh Parliament), Shahinoor Alom (Welsh Parliament), Steve Siddall (RNLI), Thomas Hollick (The Wallich), Vicki Keegans (North Wales Police), Yasmin Zahra (Welsh Parliament).

Apologies: Hollie Riste (DWP), Janette Bourne (Cruse Bereavement Support Cymru), Caryl Stock (Church Army), Heledd Fychan MS (Welsh Parliament), Nikki Jones (Manon Jones Foundation), David Heald (Papyrus), Claire Bryant (Dyfed Powys Police and Crime Commissioner's office), Shelly Godfrey-Coles (Welsh Parliament).

12pm: Welcome and introductions

Jayne Bryant MS opened the meeting and thanked everyone for attending and explained that some of what may be discussed at the meeting may be upsetting for some and advised attendees to step away and have a break from the meeting if needed and to reach out for support following the meeting if they need to.

12:05pm AGM – nomination and voting of office holders

Jayne explained the Annual General Meeting would take place and handed over to Laura Frayne from Samaritans to explain the process. Laura explained the election of the chair needed to take place. Delyth Jewell MS and James Evans MS both nominated Jayne to continue as chair and there were no other nominations for the role. Jayne was elected as chair. Jayne explained voting for the secretariat also needed to take place. There were no other nominations for the role and it was confirmed that Samaritans will continue as the secretariat.

12:10pm Minutes from previous meeting and matters arising

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed and accepted. There were no matters arising.

12:20pm: Trends in suicide and impacts of recession - Professor Ann John, Clinical Professor in Public Health and Psychiatry, Swansea University & National lead for suicide and self-harm prevention, Public Health Wales

Professor Ann John explained her presentation would focus on recession, cost of living crisis and suicide. Ann explained that data shows that major events like the pandemic have an impact on suicide and not always in the direction we think it would be. She explained there is a honeymoon effect after disasters, where people pull together. However, there is also strong evidence a recession can be linked to an increase in suicide rates.

Ann explained that many of the registrations of suicides were delayed by over a year due to the pandemic. She talked about the impact of changes in the burden of proof, the evidence threshold used by coroners, on suicide registration statistics. Ann added that during the pandemic there was concern regarding the impact on mental health and suicide for various reasons due to disruption to mental health services, impact on children and young people and adults who are vulnerable such as those experiencing domestic abuse. Also there were incorrect figures circulating on social media stating that there had been a 200% increase in suicides since the pandemic.

Ann explained how data from 33 countries looking at the first 15 months of the pandemic did not show any evidence of a greater increase of suicides up to June 2021. In many places the rates had gone down with no distinct pattern of certain ages, groups, gender etc. Ann added that the reasons were due to increased social cohesion, economic protection measures from the government and charity support. Ann discussed how recent ONS data for 2021 saw the suicide rate for 2021 had returned to pre-pandemic levels, following the decrease that had been seen in 2020. The decrease was mainly driven by a fall in suicide in men and also delays in registrations. Ann explained how in Wales we had much longer delays in registrations of suicides than England and the delays were higher than before Covid.

Ann commented how although the rates look different as numbers, they aren't different statistically. When statistical tests are done, this depends on population size and middle-aged men and women have highest rates of suicide which has always been the case. The rates have fallen in women over 45 and have fallen in older people over time. However, in children and young people aged 10 – 24, the rate is lower than middle aged people but has been rising over the decade. 2021 saw the highest rate in females since 1992. Ann added how although the rates for young people are low, that is the section of society with a consistent increase in rates and we need to look at why this is. Suicide is the leading cause of death for 10-19 year olds and the increase over decade has been seen in other western countries like US and Australia.

Ann continued that they are also seeing measurable increases in anxiety and depression, especially in older young people. The online environment has positive and negative impacts and part of the work there is to tip the balance to positive. Studies looking at why there is an increase for young people find that exam pressures and working in sectors with the most precarious conditions has an impact. Ann added that self-harm is quite common in young people, with 3 children self-harming on average per class. There has been an increase in self-harm since 2000 in older young people and most young people stop self-harming, but it is usually done as expression of things going on in their lives and we need to deal with those issues so they do not carry the risk with them. Half of people who die by suicide have a history of self-harm.

Ann talked through the reasons why people self-harm and explained that when asked, a third of people say they do it to relieve tension, unpleasant feelings and anxiety and more young people are managing their emotions with self-harming behaviours. This then could be producing young people who are more likely to use those behaviours in later life so may be feeding into suicide rates. Also people from ethnic minorities generally have lower rates than other people. The rate is higher for

those with mixed backgrounds. Ann explained how we have an ever-growing diverse population and a sense of belonging is important for our wellbeing.

Suicide, the cost-of-living crisis and heading into recession means we are in a situation where the government have spent lots of money on welfare safety nets during the pandemic and may struggle to instigate the same again. There is strong evidence that those on low incomes are at greater risk of self-harm, suicide, mental illness. Threats of job loss, debt, mental health issues, self-medicating, isolation are on various pathways to suicidal behaviours. Ann discussed how hospital data on self-harm is not collected in Wales so we do not have a wealth of knowledge here but need to address this. Work and financial issues are all higher in those that self-harmed and research has found changes in benefits may have contributed to self-harm. Ann talked about what can be done and austerity, changes in mortality rates and government expenditure. There is good evidence that good labour markets can help people and job search assistance, limiting sanctions when people do not job search. The 2008 evidence on the recession shows we need to be really focused on middle aged men.

Certain high-risk groups came out of the pandemic and one is young people. Young people work in hardest hit sectors, limited opportunities and issues around housing. An ONS bulletin also looked at high risk occupations and construction workers and carers are sectors we need to look at. Another issue is not everyone experiencing financial hardship is unemployed and we need to look at adequate welfare benefits, support for places like Citizens Advice and targeting areas most affected by the recession. Ann added that staff in the NHS and social services who come into contact with these people need regular updated signposting information for people. Other front line staff should receive training in recognising and responding to risk and services should be trained in looking for risk. Ann explained that the real time suicide surveillance data can be used to monitor the impact of policy changes. The ONS data is usually a year out of data so the real time suicide surveillance system will help with this.

Ann added that we need to think about digital poverty, there are lots of online services but those in poverty may not have access to services. Also media reporting has an impact and people rarely take their own lives due to single reason and if it is reported as such, it makes it cognitively available to people. Ann explained that if unemployment rises we need to look at sectors most affected and look at those already struggling and those with pre-existing mental health issues. The World Health Organisation is focussing their suicide strategy on limiting access to means, media work, fostering life skills in young people and prevention.

12:40pm: The cost of surviving – mental wellbeing and hunger. Tom Weekes - Senior Research Manager at Trussell Trust

Tom delivered a presentation to the group and explained the impact of the cost-of-living crisis they are seeing. He explained that the cost of budget food items value ranges has increased by 17% which is impacting those on lowest incomes and claiming universal credit. Tom discussed how a recent survey carried out by Trussell Trust included over 100 people in Wales who are claiming universal credit. The survey found that 38% said they were skipping meals so they could keep up with other essential costs and 1 in 6 reported not being able to cook hot food as they cannot afford to use their oven. This is also being seen at foodbanks where people are asking for cold food parcels with items they do not need to heat up.

Tom explained how they are seeing a broad impact on people, and they are going without dental treatments, essentials and choosing between heating or eating. The cost of surviving is what they are seeing at foodbanks and this all has a big impact on mental health and wellbeing. Tom added that for foodbanks in Wales, their busiest ever period was between April to September this year where they saw a 38% increase, a 96% increase from the same period five years ago. Many people are using foodbanks for first time. Trussell Trust thought the level of demand seen during the

pandemic would be a one-off but there have been more events impacting people and with the impact of the removal of the additional £20 for universal credit, they have had their busiest ever period. Tom commented how the main headline for their organisation is that they have never in Wales gone into Autumn/Winter period with such high levels of need.

He continued that in July the charity saw a dip in the number of donations and gave out 10,500 parcels which correlates with the cost of living payments at the time which had a short term impact on need. There is hope that by providing ppl with extra support you can reduce need for food banks. Tom talked about hunger and wellbeing and how they have experienced a record period and there is a strong link between people accessing foodbanks, going hungry and impact on wellbeing. It is clear that mental health issues are both a driver and outcome of not being able to cover the essentials. He explained how a mental health issue can often be a kick off point for many falling into crisis. Also those with existing mental health issues may find it more challenging to access support. Tom talked about how some may have been on benefits for a while, but are entrenched in day-to-day survival mode which impacts their mental health and how challenging going without essentials can be. They see stress, anxiety and depression from their service users.

In August, Trussell Trust surveyed 300 adults and asked if they had to skip meals to keep up with essential costs. 28% who skipped meals were not feeling optimistic about the future and there is a strong link between those experiencing hunger and how they feel about themselves with many in constant worry, feeling like a failure or bad parent and isolated. Tom talked about how on the matter of getting people into work and labour market interventions, if people have not eaten for days, they cannot perform at an interview and at work and we need to support people better. Tom talked about how people can find applying for benefits and interacting with system very difficult and that the system needs to treat them better. This can impact how they feel depending on how they are dealt with. Tom also highlighted how 47% of people referred to foodbanks were actually paying debt to DWP.

Trussell Trusts key policy asks are that no one should need to turn to charities for essentials like food and they are calling on all governments to take immediate action. The growing need for food banks should not become the new normal. Tom explained how people being referred to foodbanks and living in poverty are experiencing destitution, people are not just going without food they cannot afford any basics. Trussell Trust are calling for cash-based solutions as people need more than food. A cash grant scheme done alongside Leeds Council confirmed cash solutions help. People who receive cash say it has a good impact on their mental health and it provides them with choice on how to spread money across their essentials. The money people received was spent on food, bills and other essentials. It was clear it has impact on wellbeing with overwhelming consensus from service users that they preferred cash. It gives them agency, dignity and choice. Some spoke about how the grant helped them with jobs and helped alleviate loneliness and isolation as they could use funds for travel to visit friends and family.

Trussell Trust are calling for cash-based solutions in Wales and calling on the UK government to uplift benefits. However, more support is needed quickly but they also want a long-term commitment for support. Tom added how Wales needs a single access system for people accessing support with clear criteria and a new Welsh emergency fund. Trussell Trust would welcome Welsh Government developing a national plan with people with lived experience.

1pm: Questions and next steps

Sarah Murphy MS mentioned in the chat how it would be useful to discuss a potential correlation between the increase in suicides in young women and a misdiagnosis for Borderline Personality Disorder when they may have Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder instead. Ann John said personality disorders diagnoses should only be made by professionals and can be a complex area.

Maggie Corkhill from Co-alc Alliance asked Tom if he felt there was any value in time-banking and whether it would be viewed by Welsh Government as a stop gap to incentivise people on benefits. Could this be an interim option to offer support. She added how volunteering can help give purpose, provide skills and involve people in the community. Tom explained that Trussell Trust operation over 1300 foodbanks across the UK with a large volunteer base. Many people they support do go on to volunteer and find real value and purpose. He added how many who are referred to foodbanks have caring responsibilities or are disabled and have a good reason why they are unable to work so this could prevent them from volunteering too. If time-banking was linked to benefits, they would want people to not have to prove they were volunteering to get the benefits and would be another layer of administration for service users. Michaela Moore from Mental Health Matters Wales explained they have started trialling tempo time credits in Wales and people get time credit for every 4 hours of volunteering. This has been successful for them with a positive impact for people. Lynne Neagle MS mentioned in the chat she will pick up the points on time banking with Welsh Government.

Action: Lynne Neagle MS to discuss pick up points on time banking with Welsh Government.

Ann John asked Tom how extensive foodbanks were in 2008-10 during the recession and if Trussell Trust can map the service increase between then and now. Tom explained how the Trussell Trust network has grown since then and they have data on the austerity years and the need to open more foodbanks. Jayne asked how much support is given to foodbank volunteers and whether there are opportunities for signposting to different organisations. Tom explained foodbanks do signpost and there is a whole systems approach with people accessing foodbanks often referred from GP's, councils etc. Trussell Trust would like to see signposting embedded in the initial referral process, triaging people and giving them mental health referrals too. They would like a system-based approach where it is not the sole responsibility of the foodbanks to be the ones to coordinate signposting and referrals.

Emma Gooding from Samaritans mentioned how at a few meetings recently the idea of one stop shops has been discussed and there have been pilot projects on this that have worked well. She asked who should own that, so the onus is not just on the third sector to hold that. Tom explained how some foodbanks will be equipped to do that and already are, but others are a handful of volunteers completely overwhelmed by the need. He referenced the previous Leeds council work and that key was having a statutory organisation responsible. Leeds Council wanted to provide wrap around support and statutory organisation have the best opportunity but depends on what the local authority wants to do. Thomas Hollick from the Wallich mentioned in the chat how partner organisations need to be trauma informed in their approach and that holistic wrap around support is being offered by homelessness prevention services.

Jayne thanked Ann and Tom for presenting today and commented how it is crucial time, and we will see lots of further developments and will keep an eye on this. Jayne asked whether the Trussell Trust report had been shared with Jane Hutt MS as Minister for Social Justice and John Griffiths MS who chairs the CPG on Poverty. Tom said he would check this with Trussell Trust's Head of Wales.

Action: Tom Weekes to check with colleagues whether their report has been shared with Jane Hutt MS and John Griffiths MS.

1.20pm: Topic for next meeting and close

Jayne asked the groups for topics for the next meeting. Maggy Corkhill asked if she could present on the work for the Co-Alc Alliance at a future meeting and Jayne agreed. Ann John suggested the Online Harms Bill and Emma Gooding explained she could ask someone from Samaritans central office to present on their work in this area. Ann John also suggested a focus on gambling. Jayne thanked everyone for coming and confirmed the next meeting will be in 2023 and details and dates will be sent out shortly.