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McAleese: Society in the grip of high levels of anxiety

By Noel Baker

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2009

PRESIDENT Mary McAleese yesterday painted a grim picture of a country wracked by anxiety, as she told a conference in Dublin that "new burdens" had fallen on households because of the recession.

Speaking at the College of Psychiatry of Ireland's International winter Conference in Croke Park, President McAleese said: "We gather here in a phase of pervasive, high levels of anxiety and worry about the economy.

"With appalling suddenness and severity, a buoyant economy with almost full employment has given way to a recession, considerable job loss, negative equity among home owners, reductions in salaries and values of pensions, disappearance of share dividend income and share value, failed and failing businesses and a litany of hard to digest bad news."

The President told the conference that while the Irish situation was by no means unique, it had challenged our "coping skills" at a time of great uncertainty.

"The fallout from the recession has provoked or added new burdens which are now sorely testing the coping skills and the emotional resilience of individuals, families and communities," she said.

"You will know from past research what kind of impact we can expect to find among the various cohorts and constituencies most deeply affected. You will also know only too well how a barrier to accessing proper help and services arises from the continuing stigma and taboo around acknowledging mental health problems."

President McAleese said that while mental health professionals would need to play a key role in preventing the "downstream consequences" of the pressures currently affecting families, friends and family members also needed to be vigilant and supportive.

Describing mental health as a "Cinderella issue," she said: "As we know from the self-harm and suicide statistics, there is a bleak landscape of mental suffering that we need to colonise with meaningful and accessible help and prevention strategies.

"This is not a job for mental health professionals alone for so often you are not the first port of call for someone with a problem. It may be a friend, family member or a trusted adult who is the conduit through which your services are eventually accessed."

This story appeared in the printed version of the Irish Examiner Saturday, November 14, 2009

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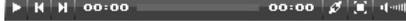
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