



College of Psychiatrists of Ireland (March 2015)

Mental Health researchers call for investment in specialist youth mental health services

According to research, over half of young Irish people will meet the criteria for a mental health disorder at some point before 25 years of age.

This is according to an Irish study, known as *The Challenging Times*, the findings from which are featured in the recent Special Youth themed Edition of the **Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine**. The papers published from this study reveal, not only **high rates of mental ill-health during adolescence and into young adulthood**, but also the serious risks for young people who experience mental health difficulties during adolescence, including **higher rates of unemployment during their young adult years**. The study involved detailed clinical interviews with young Irish people from a representative sample of schools in North Dublin, first at age 12-15 years and later when they were aged 19-24 years.

The findings reinforce the importance of early intervention in order to maximise the functional outcomes for adolescents with mental disorders to give young people the best chance to get well and get on with having full, productive and normal lives. A case made by leading advocates in the youth mental health movement in a number of editorials in the special edition of the journal.

This special edition focuses on the importance of research in identifying the needs and vulnerabilities of young people and was inspired following the adoption of **Youth Mental Health** as the official annual theme by the College of Psychiatrists of Ireland, in 2013. The College released a submission paper at this time stating that despite the perception that “the health and wellbeing of young people has never been better” in fact the ‘evidence points to high rates... of psychological distress and mental disorder among young people’. Much of the work in this Special Issue was funded by the Health Research Board (Ireland).

Associate Editors, Professor Mary Cannon and Dr. John Paul Lyne began this timely endeavour to capture the excellent work which many high profile Youth Mental Health researchers are conducting both in Ireland and abroad, and harness ongoing momentum in this important area.

Dr. John Lyne (North Dublin Mental Health service) says *'This comprehensive edition provides a clear focus on young people's mental health today. The quality contributions from both Ireland and internationally highlight the desire for reform in this area, which would be a positive investment for the future.'*

Professor Mary Cannon, (Beaumont Hospital and RCSI), says *'It is time to start focussing on providing specialised services catering for the need of young people particularly during the transition from adolescence into young adulthood. This can be a difficult time with many challenges for vulnerable youth. The reality is that our existing services simply cannot respond to the level of need among Irish youth. New models of service are required.'*

The research in this Special Issue **highlights the problems that still exist and the gaps in services for young people.** It encompasses work on prevalence rates and risk factors for mental ill - health among Irish young people and also papers describing innovative youth mental health developments in UK, Canada and Australia. The Special Issue also includes a powerful first person account from a young person, Lisa Butterly, who has experience in transitioning from child to adult mental health services in Ireland.

Director of Communications and External Affairs, Dr John Hillery welcomes the research saying: *'The Youth Mental Health Special Edition has identified the importance of early intervention model in psychiatry to maximise functional outcomes for adolescents. The College hopes research such as this can work to promote an understanding of the needs of young people in their transition from adolescence into adulthood.'*

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Notes to the Editor:

Three highlighted papers from the Youth Special Edition:

The association between economic inactivity and mental health among young people: a longitudinal study of young adults who are not in employment, education or training.

Power et al

-Young people not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs) are at an increased risk for mental disorder and suicidal ideation. This study which involved researchers from RCSI and UCD found that NEET status in young adulthood was associated with more than three-fold increased odds of any lifetime mental disorder and a seven fold increased risk of suicidal thoughts. Young people who were diagnosed with a mental health disorder in adolescence were at four fold increased risk of economic inactivity in young adulthood.

Prevalence of Mental Disorder among young adults in Ireland: A population based study, Harley et al

- The Challenging Times study follow up study was carried out by researchers from RCSI and Mater Hospital and involved tracing 212 young people who had previously been interviewed aged 12-15 years and re-interviewing them at age 19-24 years.

-The follow-up rate was 80%. The researchers found that, by age 25, nearly one in five young adults fulfilled criteria for a current mental disorder at the time of interview and 56% had fulfilled criteria for a mental disorder at some point in their lifetime. One in six of the young Irish adults in this study had fulfilled criteria for an alcohol use disorder during their lifetime.

-The researchers concluded that prevalence of psychiatric disorder and substance use was high in this sample of Irish youth. Mental Health service provision for this age group is a priority. Larger studies of nationally representative samples are needed to inform service development.

The risk and protective factors associated with depression and anxiety in a national sample of Irish adolescents. Dooley et al

-The My World survey, carried out by researchers from UCD and Headstrong, showed that one in three adolescents experienced elevated levels of depression and anxiety. Age, gender, maternal education, family composition, parental mental health as well as the experience of racism and bereavement were associated with elevated distress.

-The role of the family according to the *My World Survey* was captured as both protective (family cohesion) and risk (parental criticism). The study found that cohesive families and low levels of criticism are key to adolescents' mental health well-being. This indicates that parents should be mindful that they play a vital role in a young person's life, despite adolescents' increasing autonomy and time spent with peers. As noted, over 50% of adolescents report that their available adult is their parent; this has implications for how they may manage stressful events throughout adolescence.

-Since factors protecting and putting adolescents at risk of anxiety and depression exist at every level of the adolescent's ecological system, the study supports a community-based approach to youth mental health.

The Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine

In 2012, The Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine (IJPM) became the official research Journal of the College of Psychiatrists of Ireland. In March 2013, Cambridge University Press (CUP) partnered with us to publish the Journal, both online and in print.

Editor-In-Chief: Professor Brendan Kelly

The College of Psychiatrists of Ireland

The College of Psychiatrists of Ireland is the professional body for psychiatrists in Ireland and the sole body recognised by the Medical Council and the HSE for Competence Assurance and Training in Psychiatry. The College offers membership for psychiatrists & trainees and aims to be the voice of psychiatry in Ireland. Our members are qualified doctors who have further trained to specialise in psychiatry or are currently part of a specialist training programme in psychiatry.