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THE FUTURE OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

The Children & Young People's Mental Health Coalition is preparing the next stage of its campaign to convince the government to invest in the future of children and young people's mental health.

The 14 campaign partner organisations launched their business case for children and young people's mental health and wellbeing to ministers and opposition MPs in the House of Commons at the end of November. The campaigners say the UK is sitting on a mental health time-bomb and that the government is reacting to the consequences of mental illness rather than preventing it.

The goals are to re-establish health

visitors as trusted support figures; invest some of the pupil premium in early intervention initiatives that are proven to help emotional resilience; and to ensure no decisions about young people are taken without their active involvement in the development, delivery and commissioning of the services and in defining the outcomes.

Sarah Brennan, coalition chair, said the focus was now on getting the recommendations within the business case implemented.

The government's localisation policies meant the best way needed to be found to reach individual headteachers to tell them about the pupil premium element of the campaign's plan.

Another challenge was to ensure health visitors were trusted by the individuals they served so that they were not seen as an agent of the state and were more 'young people-friendly'. Brennan said: "Health visitors should go to people in their homes and youth clubs and in multi-service venues". This would remove some of the stigma young people felt when visiting specialist services.

"We are getting together a co-ordinated action plan for the next couple of years so we can involve all staff working with children and young people whose voices are seldom heard," Brennan said.

Words: Andrew Don: Don's Hard News

TWO THIRDS OF WOMEN ADMIT MILD TO MODERATE MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

A survey of more than 2,000 females in England and Wales revealed around two-thirds have had mild to moderate mental health problems, equivalent to 15.2 million girls and women.

Platform 51 (formerly the Young Women's Christian Association) works with over 11,000 women and girls in schools, prisons and mother and baby groups. Penny Newman, Chief Executive, said: "Millions of girls and women are facing mental health problems and they are telling us that they are not getting the support they need".

The effect not just to family but to wider society and the economy is clear. 44% of women experiencing these problems had taken some time off work. 13% had quit their job completely.

The survey includes issues such as low self-esteem, poor self-confidence, and stress, this expands on the conditions already defined by the Department of Health as 'common mental health disorders'.

According to an NHS report in 2010 around 20% of adult women in England suffered from a common mental disorder such as anxiety or depression compared with about 12% of men.

Professor Louise Howard, Head of Women's Mental Health at King's College London, revealed to the Guardian that she believes the figures were "very interesting and relevant". She said: "There is evidence that

there is under-identification of people with mental health problems who need treatment".

The research includes women with emotional difficulties as well as those with mental health problems, she added. "But any of the stresses that these women are reporting can lead to mental health problems. Depressive symptoms can persist and need treatment but some women will feel that they have to keep on coping because they have all these people depending on them."

Not only were the figures themselves staggering, but those identified with mental health problems also cope with symptoms in a variety of disturbing ways. More than a quarter regularly drink too much, almost a half had not left their homes for a long period, many were isolated from friends and family and more than a quarter had lost friends.

Debt was also a big consideration with more than one in five having mounting financial problems. Self-harm was high with one in ten affected, women aged 18 to 24 were more at risk of this behaviour with 35% affected.

"Many women appear to be functioning normally or coping adequately with particularly difficult situations when in fact they are struggling to cope," said Newman. "But we identified many risky behaviours that girls and women engaged in as a result of mental health problems, including promiscuity, drug-taking and crime."

Of the women surveyed, nearly 30% had been emotionally or physically abused. One in four of these women admitting to feeling suicidal as a result.

But around one in three women with low-level mental health problems has never sought professional help, the report *Women like me: supporting wellbeing in girls and women* found. Of those who did seek help, almost two thirds felt doctors were too ready to prescribe drugs.

Marjorie Wallace, Chief Executive of the mental health charity SANE, said: "This survey is shocking and covers a myriad of distress".

This study sheds light on many mental health and emotional distress issues suffered by women, but we should not neglect the needs of millions of men suffering these disorders. *Uncovered's* report finds that men and women alike suffer mental health issues but men deal very differently with these problems and are less likely to ask for help.

Colin Walker, Policy and Campaigns Manager for Mind mental health charity said his organisation's research showed men and women experienced mental health problems such as depression and anxiety in roughly equal numbers. "But men are less likely to speak out or ask for help," he said. "This tendency to suffer in silence is reflected by the fact that men account for 75% of all suicides."