



To determine the incidence of mental health issues at Citizens Advice North Oxfordshire and South Northamptonshire (CANOSN) related to Covid-19, and to establish help resources

There is a lot of evidence from the news media and mental health organisations regarding the negative effects on mental health related to Covid-19 (C-19). People are expressing feelings of being stressed, reporting new mental health problems, or a deterioration in existing mental problems. It is difficult to get a clear picture of the effects of C19 on people's mental wellbeing, but it can be said with certainty that the C-19 pandemic has had a profound effect, both physically and mentally on the lives of people worldwide.

In the CANOSN region we have changed our working practices since March 2020 and have been compelled by circumstance to drastically reduce face to face appointments that are a vital component of our support. Although the arguments are split in support of the efficacy of face to face vs telephone treatment in *therapy* situations, clients often feel more supported face to face when in an *advice* situation and able to talk about an issue that is *causing* mental wellbeing issues. *Freud (1895) identified the value to the individual of reducing what he termed 'hysterical misery' to 'common unhappiness' when treating mental health issues.* In today's situation this means; if we can reduce the levels of stress clients have to a more manageable level then they are more likely to respond to our help positively.

National Citizens Advice has recently identified a 9% rise in clients with mental health issues during the pandemic, and although the traditionally most stressful issues of debt and housing had a moratorium during lockdown, we now have the added problems of the return to legal actions being taken against people with these issues.

The ONS (gov.uk December 2020) report shows that:-

- In November 2020, 19% of adults experienced some form of depression, indicated by moderate to severe depressive symptoms, while 17% of adults experienced some form of anxiety.
- The proportion of adults experiencing some form of depression in the latest period is similar to earlier in the pandemic (19% in June 2020); however, these rates have almost doubled from around 10% before the pandemic (July 2019 to March 2020).
- A higher proportion of younger adults, women, disabled adults and those whose households were unable to afford an unexpected but necessary expense reported some form of depression and anxiety.
- Almost half of adults (48%) reported that their well-being was being negatively affected by the pandemic; this increased to 81% for those who had experienced some form of depression and/or some form of anxiety pre pandemic.
- A higher proportion of adults who had experienced some form of depression reported feeling lonely often or always (26%) compared with adults experiencing no or mild

depressive symptoms (3%); a similar pattern was found for adults experiencing some form of anxiety (24% and 3% respectively).

- A lower proportion of adults experiencing some form of depression and anxiety felt it would take six months or more for their life to return to normal (15% and 16% respectively) compared with 25% of those not experiencing depressive symptoms and/or some form of anxiety, who felt it would take them less time.

The ONS concluded:

“Our research today shows that one in five adults in Great Britain experienced some form of depression in November. This is similar to levels reported earlier in the year, but double that reported before the pandemic. We’ve also found similar rates of anxiety in adults in Great Britain.”

"It's also interesting to see that since late October, more adults say they believe life will return to normal within six months. However a lower proportion of adults experiencing some form of anxiety and/or depression felt this was the case”.

Lord O'Donnell (Sept 2020) in his address to the Institute of Fiscal Studies noted The UK had suffered the biggest decrease in 'subjective wellbeing' in similar countries, European, Australian and North American.

The above research shows that there is a clear relationship between Covid-19, the problems people are experiencing, with their mental wellbeing. The same problems they are coming to Citizens Advice with. In light of these findings we feel that it is important to look at the incidence of people with mental wellbeing problems contacting CANOSN during the Covid-19 pandemic, and compare it with a 'normal' year. From the data we gain and analyse we hope to be able to.

- Look at the numbers of clients contacting us with pre-existing mental health problems
- Build a picture of the effects of Covid-19 on mental health in the CANOSN area ie. stress, new mental health issues, existing mental health issues
- Determine what problems are causing the most mental health issues
- Look at strategies for helping clients with mental health issues that are related to the problems they come to Citizens Advice with.

We are in the process of compiling both local and national sources of help with various Mental Wellbeing problems so that we can give our clients the most appropriate targeted referral source.

References

Sigmund Freud, *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), (co-written with Josef Breuer)

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Lord Gus O'Donnell: lecture to IFS September 2020 (ifs.org.uk)