

STRESS, MENTAL HEALTH & SUICIDE: MID-LIFE

Issue/Problem	The mental health and emotional wellbeing of middle-aged people
Evidence Base (Equality & Inequalities Report)	<p>Younger and middle aged people were significant more likely to have experienced a great deal of stress (12 and 14%) respectively compared to those aged 65+ (9%). The proportion of middle aged people¹ (14%) experiencing a great deal of worry or stress was also significantly higher than the youngest age group² (12%).</p> <p><i>Ref: NI Health and Social Wellbeing Survey 2001 cited in “Equality and Inequalities in Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland: A Statistical Overview (DHSSPS, 2004:61)</i></p>
Evidence Base (Literature Review)	<p>Men and women in mid-life often consider themselves a distinct generation, with particular preferences and needs which tend not to be recognised in the delivery of public services. They do not identify themselves with services for “older people” and feel ignored by generic adult services.</p> <p>People in their 50s experiences multiple changes and transitions, such as decisions about work and employment, illness and death of older parents, children becoming independent and grandparenthood³.</p> <p>Many people experience powerful and emotional upheavals which may be connected with unresolved difficulties in the past, dissatisfaction with the present, a sense of loss opportunities, a fear of diminished opportunities for the future and growing older in an ageist society⁴.</p> <p>Women in mid-life face a range of specific challenges including multiple family and caring commitments which places them at an enhanced risk of psychological and emotional distress. Many women find themselves in the “poverty trap” in mid-life, primarily as a consequence of lower-pay, part-time working, family caregiving, inadequate pension provision. Widowhood, divorcees, black and minority ethnic women are particularly vulnerably to poverty in mid-life. Those with caring responsibilities and women who primarily work inside the home are at an increased risk of becoming depressed and having low self esteem⁵.</p>

Inequalities and Unfair Access Issues Emerging from the DHSSPS (2004) “Equality and Inequalities in Health and Social Care: A Statistical Overview” Report

Is the issue/problem being addressed by current or proposed strategies and policies? On what level?

[“Ageing in an Inclusive Society”](#) the strategy for older people in Northern Ireland includes many issues which are relevant to people in mid-life (e.g. economic and financial inclusion, promotion of employment opportunities, development of life-long learning and skills, delivering comprehensive and integrated health and social services).

[Investing for Health](#) and the new 20 year [Regional Strategy](#) have identified the need for integrated services for older people including the promotion of active ageing. On a community development level, the DHSSPS supports a range of initiatives and programmes including the [Investing for Health Networks](#), [Health Action Zones](#) and [Healthy Cities](#) projects which also target older people and those in mid-life. Other strategies such as the [Promoting Mental Health Strategy and Action Plan](#), the five year [Physical Activity Strategy and Action Plan](#), and the proposals for a [Carers Strategy](#) are likely to have a positive impact upon the mental and physical health of people in mid-life.

Many other Government Departments are also making positive contributions towards improving the lives of those in mid-life. A few examples include, the [New Deal 50+](#) programme which provides employment opportunities for those aged 50 and over (Department for Employment and Learning); the targeting of older people in the Invest NI [Accelerating Entrepreneurship Strategy](#); the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment “[Age Positive](#)” campaign which focuses on ending age discrimination in the workplace and promoting the business benefits of an age diverse workforce.

Is the problem amenable to further intervention by the DHSSPS or other?

A number of interventions for people in mid-life have been identified by Bowers et al (2003) including⁶:

- A strategic, whole system approach (at national, regional and local level) to targeting health improvements and reducing health inequalities for people in mid-life. Bowers et al (2003) maintain that there is currently no one single strategy or service which meets the needs of this diverse age group. Health services, businesses and the voluntary and community sector, along with mid-life people themselves, should plan together a range of services and opportunities to meet a variety of needs.
- The introduction, in co-operation with other statutory, voluntary and community sector bodies, of pre-retirement health initiatives. These could include, resource packs targeted at people in the mid-life age group; health checks; advice on employment and financial matters; training in the use of IT etc. Such initiative could also be targeted at specific groups of people (e.g. small business owners, farmers, people with learning disabilities).

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- Increasing opportunities for *social interaction* especially for people in mid-life who are unemployed, isolated or marginalised, carers, self-employed, people from black and minority ethnic communities. Opportunities for interaction should be work-based and community-based.

¹ aged 45-64

² aged 16-44

³ Bowers et al (2003) cited in Health Development Agency (2005) *Crisis – What Crisis?: Improving Health and Wellbeing in Mid-Life. A Briefing Paper for the East Midlands.* http://www.hda-online.org.uk/Documents/crisis_what_crisis.pdf

⁴ Mind. *How to Survive a Mid Life Crisis.* <http://www.mind.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/CE2D3A68-809F-4C91-A72E-C7DBAC541A0F/0/midlifecrisis.pdf>

⁵ Milne, A. & Williams, J. (2003) *Women at the Crossroads: A literature review of the mental health risks facing women in mid-life.* London: The Mental Health Foundation. <http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/html/content/updatev04i21.pdf>

⁶ Bowers, H., Secker, J., Llanes, M. & Webb, D. (2003) *The Gap Years: Rediscovering Midlife as the Route to Healthy Active Ageing.* Health Development Agency. http://www.hda-online.org.uk/Documents/gap_years.pdf