

ATTITUDES TOWARDS MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC:

Findings from a Nationally Representative Sample of Irish Adults



BACKGROUND

Mental Health Reform collaborated with the COVID-19 Psychological Research Consortium (C19PRC) to explore public attitudes towards the mental health services during the COVID-19 pandemic. The C19PRC is a group of mental health researchers from Ireland and the United Kingdom who are conducting projects in both countries to understand the mental health effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a brief summary of a peer-reviewed study carried out by C19PRC researchers in Maynooth University, in collaboration with Mental Health Reform, and published in January 2022.



WHO TOOK PART?

A representative sample (1,032 adults; Male: 48%, Female: 52%; Average age: 45) from the Irish population completed a C19PRC survey in April 2020 which contained six-items designed to measure public attitudes about mental health issues during the COVID-19 pandemic.



WHAT DID WE DO?

The research team used the data collected to explore public views on the need for resources for mental health services and the responsibility of government to respond to mental health needs. They also explored who and why people may hold favourable or unfavourable views towards the prioritisation of mental health issues.

WHAT DID WE FIND?

Expected Impact: ←

75% that the COVID-19 pandemic will have long-term implications for the mental health and well-being in our society (disagree: 6%; neither: 19%).

AGREED

Resourcing Mental Health Services and Supports: €€€€

80% mental health services require additional resources to deal with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health (disagree: 6%; neither: 14%).

AGREED

78% charity and voluntary organisations require additional resources to deal with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health (disagree: 7%; neither: 16%).

AGREED

Government Response: →

75% that the Government should develop a mental health strategy to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (disagree: 5%; neither: 19%).

AGREED

67% that mental health and well-being should be a priority in the Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic (disagree: 9%; neither: 24%).

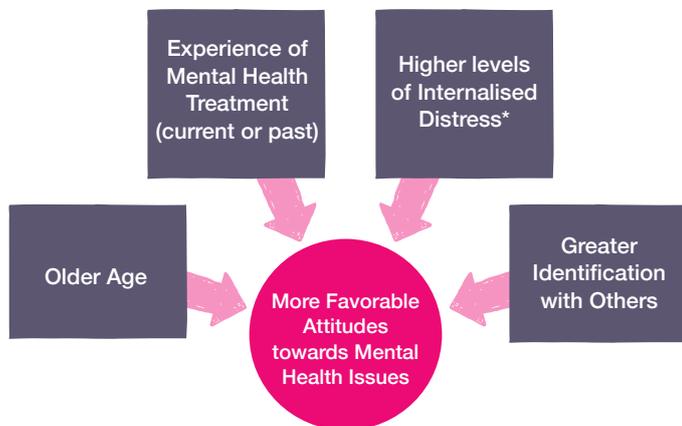
AGREED

44% that the Government has done enough to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health (agree: 23%; neither: 32%).

DISAGREED

FAVOURABLE ATTITUDES TO MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES: WHO AND WHY?

Here are the socio-demographic and psychological characteristics found to be associated with favourable attitudes towards mental health issues:



* Participants' level of internalised distress was attained by summing participant scores on measures of anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

These findings indicate the Irish public hold very favourable attitudes towards the prioritisation of mental health issues and value greater government investment in addressing mental health needs.

A large majority of adults in Ireland believed that the COVID-19 pandemic would have a long-term impact on mental health and well-being, that the government had not done enough to address the impact of the pandemic on public mental health at the time of the survey, and that mental health service providers will require additional resources post-pandemic.

Older age and a disposition towards empathy and compassion for others were associated with more favourable attitudes towards mental health issues. Having experience of mental health treatment and reporting higher levels of anxiety, depression and/or post-traumatic stress were also associated with more favourable attitudes. Given how common mental health difficulties are in the Irish population, this may help explain the overwhelmingly positive attitudes towards mental health issues among the Irish public.

COMMENTS FROM THE RESEARCH TEAM:

Christa McCutchen of the Department of Psychology at Maynooth University who led this research said of the results:

"We found overwhelming public support for additional resourcing of mental health services in Ireland. It is clear from our findings that the public wishes the government to prioritise mental health as a key component of their health policy." Ms. McCutchen also stated that "we were encouraged to find that favourable attitudes to mental health in Ireland did not differ between men and women, those living in rural or urban locations, those with different levels of education, and a host of other demographic factors." She continued by saying "Our results show that mental health attitudes are extremely positive across many different groups in society".

P. Hyland, also of the Department of Psychology at Maynooth University, further added:

"Experience of mental health problems was a key predictor of holding favourable mental health attitudes. Our own research finds that approximately 40% of adults in Ireland experience mental health problems at any point in time. Mental health affects everyone in society, therefore, either directly or indirectly."



For more information, see:

- * McCutchen, C., Hyland, P. & Ó Féich, P. "Attitudes Towards Mental Health Services During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Findings from a Nationally Representative Sample of Irish Adults," Journal of Behavioural Health Service Research, 13 (2022): 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11414-021-09785-x>
- * COVID-19 Psychological Research Consortium in Ireland: www.mentalhealthsap.com
- * Mental Health Reform: www.mentalhealthreform.ie

Related Publications:

- * Hyland, P., Rochford, S. N., Munnely, A., Dodd, P., Fox, R., Vallières, F., McBride, O., Shevlin, M., Bentall, R. P., Butter, S., Karatzias, T., & Murphy, J. "Predicting risk along the suicidality continuum: A longitudinal, nationally representative study of the Irish population during the COVID-19 pandemic," Suicide and Life-Threatening Behaviour, 52 (2022): 83-98. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sitb.12783>

- * Hyland, P., Vallières, F., McBride, O., Murphy, J., Shevlin, M., Bentall, R. P., Butter, S., Hartman, T. K., Karatzias, T., MacLachlan, M., Maguire, R., McHugh Power, J., Spikol, E., & Daly, M. "Mental health of adults in Ireland during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic: Results from a nationally representative, longitudinal study," Psychological Medicine. (2021): 1-3: <https://www.doi.org/10.1017/S0033291721004360>

- * Shevlin, M., Butter, S., McBride, O., Murphy, J., Gibson-Miller, J., Hartman, T. K., Levita, L., Mason, L., Martinez, A. P., McKay, R., Stocks, T., Bennett, K., Hyland, P., Vallières, F., & Bentall, R. P. Psychological responses to the COVID-19 pandemic are heterogeneous but have stabilised over time: One-year longitudinal follow-up of the COVID-19 Psychological Research Consortium (C19PRC) Study. Psychological Medicine, (2021): 1-3. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291721004025>