

Annex A: Methodology

A.1 Research design

This research for the final report of the Mental Health and Income Commission consisted of:

- A review of the academic and grey literature, and existing government policy
- An online survey of 2,000 people aged 18 and over across the UK, carried out by Opinium between 4-7 December 2020, weighed to be nationally representative
- Two workshops with policy experts and representatives from a range of organisations
- Work in October 2020 with our Research Community - a group of people with lived experience of mental health problems - consisting of an online survey, two focus groups and the third and final survey as part of our depth research.

Further details on each component of the research are provided below.

A mixed methods approach was used to combine statistics on the incomes, employment and benefits circumstances of people with experience of mental health problems, together with rich qualitative data on how employment, the benefits system and the Covid-19 pandemic have people's mental health and finances.

We are grateful to all those who supported this research by sharing their personal experience.

A.2 Literature review

Researchers completed a review of government economic policy designed to mitigate the harm caused by the coronavirus outbreak. This included policy developments on the benefits system, employment support and financial forbearance with household debts and financial responsibilities.

Alongside this, a broad desk-based review was undertaken of grey literature published in response to the crisis. This review included literature on the current mental health and financial impact of the crisis, as well as future forecasts for the long-term impact of the crisis on people's finances and mental health.

A.3 Online survey

To understand the different financial positions of people with and without experience of mental health problems before and after the crisis, we commissioned Opinium to conduct an online survey of 2,000 people aged 18 and over across the UK, weighted to be nationally representative. This survey was carried out between 4-7 December 2020.

We asked participants "Have you ever experienced a mental health problem?" and used responses to this question to compare outcomes between those who have and have not experienced a mental health problem:

- 37% had ever experienced a mental health problem

- 52% had never experienced a mental health problem
- The remaining respondents answered “don’t know” (6%) or “prefer not to say” (5%).

Participants were asked a series of closed questions about their incomes, their experience of work since the onset of the pandemic and before it and their views looking ahead to a period after more Covid-19 restrictions have been lifted. In order to focus on the experiences of those most likely to be in work, we report many of the findings in the paper solely for those of working-age (18-65), of whom there were 1,547 respondents. In reporting findings related to attitudes about returning to work after more Covid-19 restrictions are lifted, we excluded those respondents who replied “not applicable”, leaving us with 1,226 respondents.

A.4 Policy workshops

In order to generate ideas and test our emerging thinking, we held two policy workshops. The attendees were from a range of organisations, listed below. We are grateful to those who attended but their participation does not indicate support for our final recommendations.

Astriid
Citizens Advice
Confederation of British Industry
Health Foundation
Income Max
Joseph Rowntree Foundation
Learning and Work Institute
Living Wage Foundation
Mind
Poverty Alliance
Resolution Foundation
Trades Union Congress

A.5 Research Community surveys

As part of our research programme for the Mental Health and Income Commission, two previous surveys with the Research Community were carried out in April and May 2020. The results were used to inform our first report in the series, looking at the incomes of people with mental health problems.

Respondents to the survey in May were asked to express an interest in taking part in a piece of depth research, contributing at three points in time: June, August and October 2020. Engaging with respondents at three points in time allowed us an opportunity to understand how the coronavirus crisis has evolved and impacted on people’s mental health problems and financial circumstances. From our initial call, 196 respondents expressed an interest in the depth research. From those 29 were sampled, and 15 completed full consents.

The depth research broadly considered how respondents’ mental health problems have impacted their engagement with the labour market and benefits system over their life, and also

how the coronavirus crisis has impacted on respondents' mental health and financial circumstances.

The research - in the form of an online, written survey - used semi-structured questions to encourage respondents to write fully and freely about their experiences. The third survey was distributed in October 2020 to the eight respondents who completed the previous survey, all of whom completed the third survey. Open questions and prompts were used to explore:

- Respondents' income and mental health circumstances at that point in time
- How respondents' mental health problems had affected their ability to work over the last decade
- How respondents were feeling about their future income prospects.

To avoid causing distress to participants, all questions were optional. All survey responses were analysed thematically and used to develop the narrative and illustrate the report. Respondents who completed all three surveys were given a £30 voucher as a thank you gift for taking part.

We conducted a wider survey on similar issues in October 2020, which 384 Research Community members responded to. The questions discussed what people look for when seeking employment and the support they have received with their mental health in the workplace.

Using the survey responses as a sampling tool, we held two online focus groups in October 2020, with a total of 13 participants, exploring their experiences of receiving incomes through employment and benefits. All focus group participants were provided with a £30 Amazon voucher as a thank you gift for taking part. A written transcript of the focus groups were thematically coded. Emerging themes were used to formulate an understanding that was checked with other members of the research team, and cross-checked with data from the surveys and the literature. These findings were used to inform policy recommendations, ensuring our recommendations were grounded in experience and practice.