

Annex A: Methodology

This note outlines the methodological approach taken in Money and Mental Health's 2023 report, *The pensions maze: achieving better retirements for people with mental health problems*, by Nikki Bond.

A.1 Research design

This research project consisted of the following:

- A review of the academic and grey literature and existing government policy
- Two surveys with members of Money and Mental Health's Research Community with people with lived experience of mental health problems.
- Two focus groups with members of the Research Community.
- Analysis of two external datasets, Understanding Society and the Financial Lives Survey
- An advisory group of stakeholders in the pensions field.

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

A mixed-methods approach was used to combine statistics on the experiences of people with mental health problems in saving for retirement and accessing pensions information and guidance, together with rich qualitative data on specific barriers they face and their needs for a pensions information and guidance service that meets their needs.

A.2 Literature review

Researchers completed a desk-based review of the current policy context of pension savings and information and guidance services. This included a review and update of existing policies related to auto-enrolment, the stronger nudge to pensions information and guidance and the suite of information and guidance services offered through, among others, the Money and Pensions Service (MaPS). This review was used to inform policy recommendations in the report's final section.

A.3 Research Community Surveys

Two surveys, as detailed below, were undertaken with the Money and Mental Health Research Community, a group of thousands of people with lived experience of mental health problems or of caring for someone who does.

First survey

An initial online survey of the Money and Mental Health Research Community was carried out online between 2-16 September 2022 to understand the experiences of people with mental health problems in saving for retirement, the impact, if any, of the cost of living crisis on their ability to pay into a pension, and their experiences of accessing information, advice or guidance. A total of 472 people responded. This survey provided insights into the experiences of both those still saving for retirement and those who had retired about saving for a pension and accessing information, guidance and advice.

Second survey

A second online survey with the Research Community was carried out between 3 - 17 February 2023. The survey, which contained open and closed questions, delved deeper into the experiences of people with mental health problems in accessing retirement planning services and their needs and wishes. Qualitative questions asked about how, if at all, people's mental health problems impacted their ability to access and understand pensions information and guidance, specifically their support and communication needs. 272 people with lived experience of mental health problems responded. Responses to qualitative questions were analysed thematically, and the data was used to highlight trends identified in analysis of external datasets by providing illustrative examples of people's experiences.

All questions were optional to avoid causing distress to participants, meaning the base size for questions varies. We also routed questions where necessary to avoid asking questions irrelevant to a participant's experiences.

We are grateful to all Money and Mental Health Research Community members who supported this research by sharing their personal experiences.

A.4 Focus group

Using responses from the Research Community surveys as a sampling tool, we held two online focus groups on 10 October 2022 and 20 February 2023, with eight participants each. All focus group participants were given a £35 shopping voucher as a thank-you gift for participating. Responses to qualitative questions from the first and second Research Community surveys were analysed thematically and used to develop the topic guide for the focus groups.

The first focus group explored external and internal barriers to accumulation and the impact of mental health problems on decumulation decisions. The second considered people's experiences of and barriers to planning for retirement, alongside an exploration of what good retirement planning services, information, and guidance would look like for people with mental health problems.

Written transcripts of the focus groups were thematically coded. Emerging themes were used to understand people's experiences and cross-check with analysis of external datasets and the Research Community survey. These findings were used to inform policy recommendations, ensuring our recommendations were grounded in experience and practice.

A.5 Analysis of external datasets

No single dataset allows us to address all the critical aspects of retirement planning for people with mental health problems. As such, we used two different datasets: the FCA's *Financial Lives Survey* from 2020; and *Understanding Society, Wave 10, 2018-2019*. Below, we outline our approaches to each dataset, how we constructed a mental health indicator and the other relevant questions used.

Financial Lives - Financial Lives is a nationally representative survey of UK consumers owned by the FCA. It provides information about consumers' attitudes towards managing their money, the financial products they have and their experiences of engaging with financial services firms. A total of 16,190 respondents completed the February 2020 survey.¹

In this survey, all respondents were asked, "Have you ever experienced a mental health problem?" The group of people with a mental health problem consisted of those who answered "yes, in the last 2 years" and "yes, longer ago". The group of people without a mental health problem consisted of those who answered "no" to this question. We used this to understand differences between those with and without experience of mental health problems in accessing pension information and guidance and the extent to which these two groups understood the pension options available to them and their plans for how to use their pension savings.

Understanding Society - Understanding Society is the largest longitudinal household panel study, following participants over a long period of time and interviewing participants every year. The data can provide a long-term perspective on people's lives or a snap-shot understanding of people's circumstances. We analysed data from Wave 10, 2018-2019.

Wave 10 of Understanding Society includes a question which asks about the diagnosis of an emotional, nervous or psychiatric condition. However, this would not include all those who have experienced a mental health problem and not received a formal diagnosis - estimated to be over one-third of people experiencing a mental health problem.² Instead, we used a derived variable of subjective well-being (*h_scghq2_dv*), which is based on a set of 12 questions that gets at the experiences of symptoms of mental health problems and gives a score across them. Other research³ suggests a score of 4-12 indicates someone is experiencing significant mental distress. Based on this, we split respondents into two groups - those experiencing significant mental distress and those not - to explore outcomes related to workplace pension schemes.

A.6 An advisory group

To generate ideas and test our emerging thinking, we held two meetings with an advisory group in September 2022 and February 2023. The attendees were from a range of organisations

¹ <https://www.fca.org.uk/publications/research/financial-lives>

² [The Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey 2014](#)

³ Kromydas T et al. Which is most important for mental health: Money, poverty, or paid work? A fixed-effects analysis of the UK Household Longitudinal Study. *SSM Population Health*. 2021

listed below. We are grateful to those who attended, but their participation does not indicate agreement with our findings or support for our final recommendations.

- Pensions Policy Institute
- Diversity in Pensions
- Age UK
- Nest
- Money and Pensions Service
- International Longevity Centre