

Economic crises and mental health: unhappy bedfellows

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The world economic crisis has had an immediate and a longer-term effect on mental health. In the UK, there has been a rise in suicides (Barr *et al*, 2012) and in the USA a similar picture is emerging (Reeves *et al*, 2012), but the main impact recorded thus far has been in countries hit hardest by the economic cut-backs necessitated by excessive national debt repayment. We present articles from three European countries that have suffered especially serious repercussions from the debt crisis. In Greece, suicides have risen by 60% since 2007. Nikos Christodoulou and Dimitris Anagnostopoulos review the future of mental health services in Greece, in the face of what they describe as a 'catastrophe'. They point out that Greek society has traditionally depended upon an informal approach to care in the community, provided by the family and the Church, but with increasing fragmentation (characterised as the 'Western' way of life), this is proving hard to sustain.

Ireland was one of the first countries to recognise its economic vulnerability, and to take radical steps to rectify the problem even though this meant a reduction in living standards for many. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the long-standing self-appraisal by the Irish as a particularly happy nation has been adversely affected by the economic crisis, and the correlation of happiness with income has strengthened in recent years. Brendan Kelly and

Anne Doherty provide a valuable perspective on the impact of the downturn in the Irish economy on mental health and well-being, noting the rather surprising observation that prescriptions of antidepressants north of the border in Ulster still far exceed those in the Republic.

Finally, Luis Salvador-Carulla and Miquel Roca discuss the burgeoning unemployment rate in Spain, especially among the young. This now stands at over 50%, rather worse than the situation in Greece, and it is particularly acute among those with limited education. Younger adults are more likely than not to live with their parents, and to some extent families have buffered the impact of the economic crisis on threats to mental health. Also, the Spanish government initially acted to support healthcare at the expense of the wider economy, increasing national debt substantially as a consequence. Such measures cannot be sustained, and the future appears increasingly bleak, especially for young people without specific skills and training.

References

Barr, B., Taylor-Robinson, D., Scott-Samuel, A., *et al* (2012) Suicides associated with the 2008–10 economic recession in England: time trend analysis. *BMJ*, 345, e5142.

Reeves, A., Stuckler, D., McKee, M., *et al* (2012) Increase in state suicide rates in the USA during economic recession. *Lancet*, 380, 1813–1814.

ECONOMIC CRISES AND MENTAL HEALTH

The financial crisis and the future of mental health in Greece

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The recent financial crisis in Greece has affected the mental health of the population as well as mental health service provision and planning. These new adverse circumstances call for the profession's swift response. In this paper we make evidence-based suggestions for urgent, as well as longer-term, mental health reform. We consider psychiatric prevention and mental health promotion to be the central principles to abide by in the long term. We also offer suggestions for important current issues, including the devolution and coordination of decision-making, the further development of community psychiatry and the implementation

of sectorisation, support for service user involvement, the reform of psychiatric education and the creative integration of mental health service provision with Greek culture. We conclude that enhanced participation of the profession in decision-making and service planning can result in cost-effective, evidence-based reform.

In recent years Greece has been experiencing a financial catastrophe, which has already affected mental health service provision and the mental health of the population. The financial crisis has