

# Northern Ireland Health and Social Wellbeing Survey 2001

Bulletin number 2

February 2002

## Mental Health and Wellbeing

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Commissioned by the  
Department of Health,  
Social Services and  
Public Safety



This is the second in a series of bulletins produced from the Northern Ireland Health and Social Wellbeing Survey 2001.

This bulletin presents some of the key findings from the mental health section of the survey. The bulletin focuses on 4 main areas: stressful life events, possible mental health problems, stress and levels of social support.

Each topic area has been analysed by a number of background variables such as

age, sex, socio-economic group and marital status.

The more sensitive questions on mental health problems and social support were addressed by self-completion.

In addition to this bulletin, tables of all the key areas analysed by all the background variables along with the survey questions and a technical notes supplement are available on-line. Details of how to access these are provided at the end of this bulletin.

### Stressful life events

Respondents were asked about a range of potentially stressful life events or difficulties they had experienced in the previous 12 months. Such events have the potential to impact on the mental health of individuals. Table 1. outlines the prevalence of these life events.

#### Health related life events

A family member or friend with a serious health condition was the most common health related life event (25%). 16% of people had experienced the death of a close family member. 45% of respondents had not experienced any health related problems in the previous 12 months.

#### Work related life events

17% of respondents in paid employment in the previous 12 months had changed their job. However the majority of respondents, 71%, reported no work related life events in the previous 12 months.

#### Relationship life events

The most common difficulty in relationships over the previous 12 months was falling out or having a serious disagreement with a friend or relative or feeling betrayed by someone, 7%.

The vast majority of respondents (81%) had not experienced any relationship related difficulties during this time.

#### Other personal life events

5% of respondents had experienced major financial problems in the previous 12 months. 7% of those in paid employment in the previous 12 months, thought they would soon lose their job.

Overall, 31% of respondents had not experienced any potentially stressful life events in the previous 12 months.

Table 1. Prevalence of key life events

Key life event	%
A member of family had a serious health condition	25%
Changed jobs	17%
A close family member died	16%
An existing health condition got worse	16%
A close friend or someone important to you died	10%
Had an operation or spent a period in hospital	9%
Fallen out or had disagreement with relative/ friend	7%
Thought you would soon lose your job	7%
Serious difficulty with any of your children	6%
No potentially stressful life event	31%
Base	4689

## Mental health problems

A widely used set of questions called the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ12) was used to identify the possible existence of a mental health problem such as depression.

### Age and sex

21% of all people aged 16 and over showed signs of a possible mental health problem by scoring highly on the GHQ12.

17% of men and 24% of women showed signs of a possible mental health problem. Women in most age groups, with the exception of those aged 55-64, were more likely than men to show signs of mental health problems.

### Marital status

Those people who are married but separated from their partner were more likely to show signs of a possible mental health problem than those people who were married and living with their partners, 35% compared with 19%.

### Religion

19% of Protestants showed signs of a possible mental health problem compared with 23% of Catholics.

### Socio economic group

Potential mental health problems were lowest in the professional/ managerial SEG (18%) and the skilled manual group (17%) and highest in the partly skilled group, 25%.

### Employment status

The unemployed were almost twice as likely to show signs of a possible mental health problem (30%) as those in employment (16%).

### General health

Those people who said their health was not good in the previous 12 months were more than 4 times as likely as those people who felt their health was good to show signs of a possible mental health problem, 49% compared with 12%.

### Cigarette smoking and drinking

Regular cigarette smokers were more likely to show signs of a possible mental health problem than those people who have never smoked cigarettes, 27% and 18% respectively.

Respondents who drank above the recommended weekly level were no more likely to show signs of a possible mental health problem than those respondents who drank within the recommended levels, 21% and 20% respectively.

### Personal life events

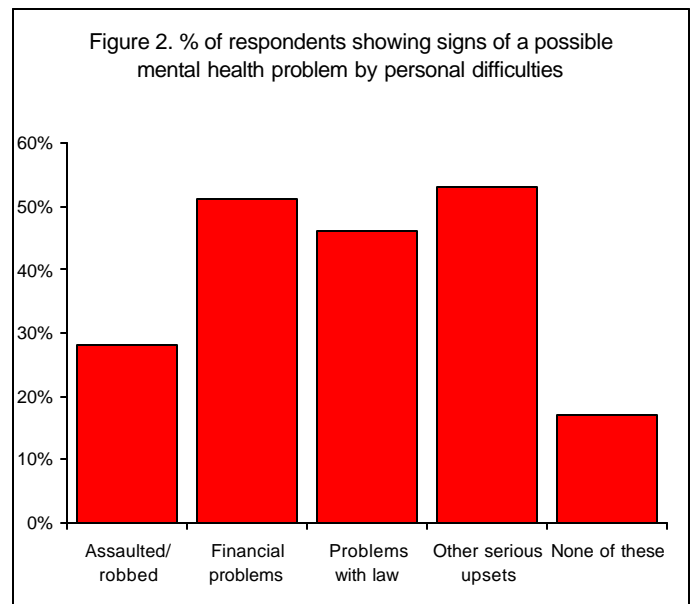
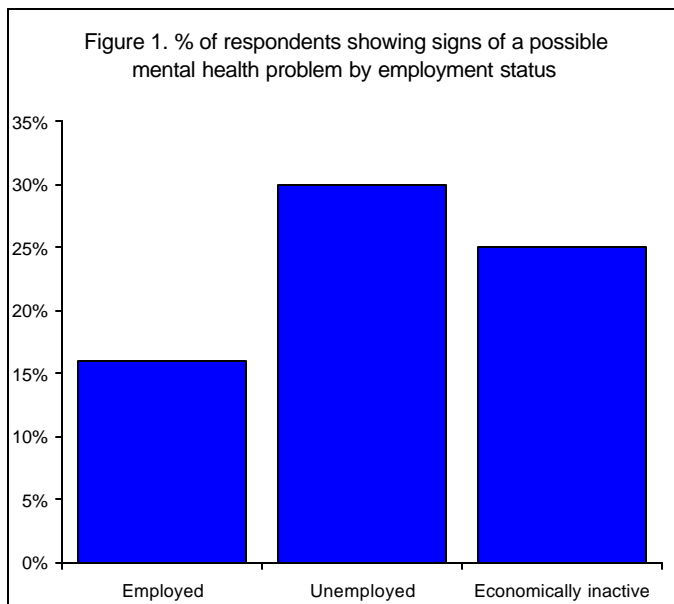
Respondents who experienced major financial problems in the previous 12 months were 3 times as likely as those who reported no personal difficulties to exhibit signs of a possible mental health problem, 51% compared with 17%.

### Control over life decisions

Respondents who had little control over decisions that affect their life were more than twice as likely to show signs of a possible mental health problem (45%) as those who were satisfied with the amount of control they have (19%).

### Effect of the troubles

People who said they have been affected a lot by the troubles were almost twice as likely to show signs of a possible mental health problem (34%) as those who had not been affected much (18%).



## Stress

### **Age and sex**

Respondents were asked about the level of stress they had experienced over the previous 12 months. Overall, 12% of persons aged 16 and over had experienced a great deal of worry or stress, 27% quite a lot and 61% had experienced little or no worry or stress.

This section focuses on those respondents who experienced a great deal of worry or stress in the previous 12 months.

Women were more likely to have experienced a great deal of worry or stress than men, 14% compared with 10%.

### **Employment status**

Unemployed people were more likely to have experienced a great deal of worry or stress than those in employment, 17% compared with 10%.

### **Socio economic group**

There was no significant difference in the levels of reported stress across the different socio-economic groups.

### **Marital status**

Respondents who were married but separated from their partner were most likely to have experienced a great deal of worry or stress (24%) and those who were single were least likely (9%).

### **Religion**

12% of Catholics and 11% of Protestants experienced a great deal of worry or stress in the previous 12 months.

### **General health**

Respondents who said their general health was not good in the previous 12 months were 5 times as likely as those whose general health was good to have experienced a great deal of worry or stress, 30% and 6% respectively.

### **Limiting long standing illness**

People who have a limiting long standing illness were more than twice as likely as those who do not, to have experienced a great deal of worry or stress, 21% compared with 8%.

### **Cigarette smoking and drinking status**

Those people who regularly smoke cigarettes were more likely to have experienced a great deal of worry or stress than those who have never smoked cigarettes, 16% compared with 10%.

Respondents who drank above the recommended weekly level were no more likely to have experienced a great deal of worry or stress (11%) than those respondents who drank within the recommended levels (11%).

### **Relationship life events**

Respondents who had felt betrayed or disappointed by their spouse or partner were more likely to have experienced a great deal of worry or stress than those people who had no relationship difficulties, 44% and 9%.

### **Health and family life events**

Respondents who had developed or found out that they had a serious illness or disability in the previous 12 months were 6 times more likely to have experienced a great deal of worry or stress (32%) than those who have not experienced any health and family related life events (5%).

### **Personal life events**

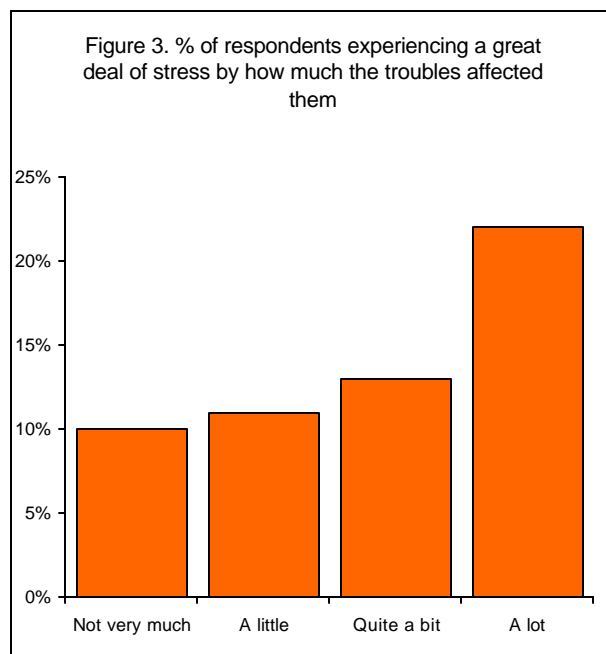
People who have had major financial problems were about 5 times as likely as those who have not experienced any personal difficulties to have experienced either a great deal of worry or stress in the previous 12 months, 41% and 8% respectively.

### **Effect of the troubles**

People who have been affected a lot by the troubles were more than twice as likely as those who have not been affected much to have experienced a great deal of worry or stress over the previous 12 months, 22% and 10% respectively.

### **Perception of own weight**

Respondents who felt they weigh a lot less than they should or a lot more than they should were more likely to have experienced a great deal of worry or stress, 20% and 17%, compared to those who felt they weigh just about the right amount, 9%.



## Social Support

### **Age and sex**

Respondents were asked about the amount of social support they received from family and friends. Overall, 40% of people aged 16 and over experienced a lack of social support, with 14% experiencing a 'severe lack' of social support. Men were more likely to have experienced a severe lack of social support (17%) than women (12%).

### **Employment status**

Unemployed respondents were almost twice as likely as those in employment to have experienced a severe lack of social support, 27% compared with 14%.

### **Socio economic group**

Respondents in the professional/managerial (11%) and skilled non-manual groups (11%) were the least likely to have experienced a severe lack of social support, with those in the partly skilled group (19%) the most likely.

### **Marital status**

The feeling of a severe lack of social support was highest amongst those respondents who were married but separated from their partner and lowest among those who are married and living with their partner, 20% and 12% respectively.

### **Religion**

14% of both Catholics and Protestants had experienced a severe lack of social support in the previous 12 months.

### **General health**

Respondents whose general health was not good were more likely to have experienced a severe lack of social support in the previous 12 months than those whose health was good, 15% and 12% respectively.

### **Cigarette smoking and drinking status**

People who regularly smoke cigarettes were almost twice as likely to experience a severe lack of social support (19%) as those who have never smoked cigarettes (11%).

Respondents who drank above the recommended weekly level were more likely to have experienced a severe lack of social support (17%) than those respondents who drank within the recommended levels (14%).

### **Personal life events**

A severe lack of social support was most prevalent amongst people who had experienced major financial

problems in the previous 12 months and least prevalent amongst those who had not experienced any personal problems, 28% and 13% respectively.

### **Relationship life events**

30% of people aged 16 and over who felt betrayed or disappointed by their spouse or partner had experienced a severe lack of social support in the previous 12 months, compared with 12% of people who have not had relationship related stress problems during this time.

### **Neighbourhood safety.**

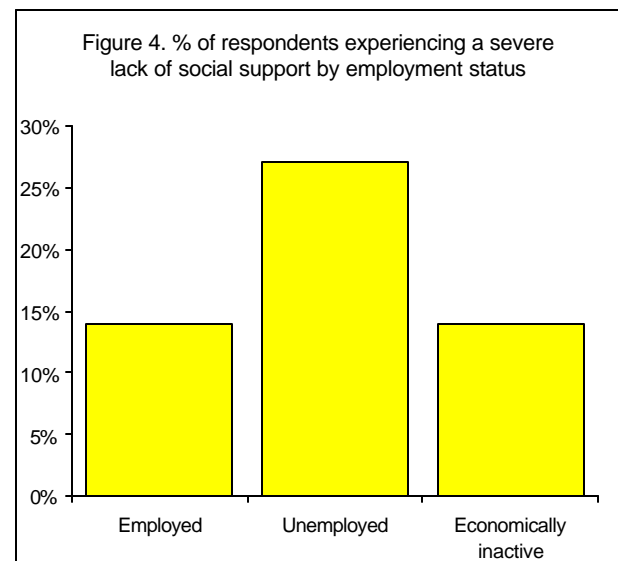
Respondents who felt their neighbourhood was not a place in which they personally feel safe were almost twice as likely to have experienced a severe lack of social support than those who feel their neighbourhood was a place of safety, 23% compared with 13%.

### **Possible mental health problem**

Those people who have shown signs of a possible mental health problem were more than twice as likely to have experienced a severe lack of social support in the previous 12 months (23%) as those who did not (10%).

### **Level of reported stress**

People who experienced a great deal of worry or stress were almost twice as likely to have a severe lack of social support (20%) as those with no worry or stress (12%)



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