

NOT JUST STICKS & STONES

A Survey of the Stigma, Taboos and Discrimination Experienced by People with Mental Health Problems

Report Authors: Jim Read & Sue Baker
November 1996
The Mental Health Charity

INTRODUCTION TO SURVEY

This survey was commissioned to investigate discrimination faced by people with mental health problems, and the extent to which it affects their everyday lives.

The survey was designed specifically to provide a human and accurate insight into the real cost of discrimination to individuals and to society.

The report is based on people's personal experiences of unfair and unjust discrimination, based on their psychiatric history or current mental health problems.

This report does not attempt to provide a comprehensive audit of discrimination in its many forms, but is designed to highlight some key areas of concern which will help inform Mind's campaign against discrimination, due to be launched in 1997.

METHODOLOGY

2,500 questionnaires were sent to local Mind Associations, Mindlink members (Mind's network of people who have experienced mental health problems) and the UKAN network of independent advocacy groups. As some groups photocopied the questionnaires, it is difficult to be more precise about the final numbers distributed.

The questionnaires were sent out in mid-September, and returned by mid-October 1996. This report contains the initial analysis of 778 completed questionnaires.

Some questions had multiple choice answers, where respondents could tick more than one answer, so final figures may total more than 100%.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- *A third of people (34%) said they had been dismissed or forced to resign from jobs*

69% of people had been put off applying for jobs for fear of unfair treatment

- *Almost half (47%) the people had been abused or harassed in public, and 14% had been physically attacked*

A quarter (25%) of people felt at risk of attack inside their own homes 26% of people were forced to move home because of harassment

- *Almost a quarter (24%) of parents said their children had been teased or bullied, or that they were afraid it would happen*

25% of people had been turned down by insurance or finance companies

Half (50%) of people felt unfairly treated by general health care services

A third (33%) complained that their GP had treated them unfairly

- *45% of people thought that discrimination had increased in the last five years compared with 18% who thought it had decreased*

RESPONDENTS

People were asked to name their psychiatric diagnosis, and the vast majority of respondents had been given a formal psychiatric diagnosis. The diagnosis mentioned after each quote in the report, is exactly that given by the respondent.

The diagnoses given included: anxiety, depression, manic depression, schizophrenia, personality disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, psychosis, post traumatic stress disorder, agoraphobia, panic attacks, eating disorders, and seasonal affective disorder (SAD).

51% of respondents were women and 49% were men.

Ages ranged from 18 to 74.

Response by Mind Region/Wales:

10% (79) South West
32% (250) South East
10% (75) Wales
18% (137) Trent & Yorkshire
8% (66). West Midlands
10% (74) North West
5% (39) Northern
7% (58) of respondents gave no address.

Respondents were asked to identify their ethnic background:

Caribbean (9), African (2), Indian (7), Pakistani (1), Bangladeshi (1), Chinese (1), Other Asian (6), Irish (35), European (31), UK (675), Other (10)

Race and mental health

Discrimination operates in different ways for different groups, for example black people with mental health problems are especially likely to face employment discrimination and to be stereotyped as 'big, black and dangerous'.

Mind is planning to produce further reports on discrimination faced by different groups, including black people's experiences which will provide more detailed analysis on multi-discrimination in relation to ethnicity and mental health.

As some of the quotes about race and mental health are a powerful testimony to the additional discrimination faced by black people with mental health problems, they have been listed separately;

"Some professionals think I am black shit, others just think I am a 'paki'. Because I am labelled a schizophrenic I am treated as a second class citizen in all respects, if my label is known. My GP thinks I'm evil. I've had to lie to get anywhere and do anything."

(Man aged 31, diagnosed with schizophrenia, North West)

"When I was in hospital it seemed social workers brought in new white patients, but black patients were usually brought in by the police and shoved in lock-up wards."

(Man aged 24, diagnosed with bipolar affective disorder, South East)

"I suffer multiple-discrimination; firstly on mental health grounds

because of depression, secondly on being a single parent and having depression, and thirdly on mental health grounds and my ethnicity."

(Man aged 29, diagnosed with depression, no address given)

"I suffer discrimination because of being held back all the time by other people, who say its my fault especially as I'm from a West Indian background."

(Man aged 40, diagnosed with chronic schizophrenia, South East)

"Someone who had befriended my son and I then turned on us, calling me and the disorder I suffer from as a 'nigger disease'."

(Woman aged 36, diagnosed with lupus - SLE, South West)

MAIN FINDINGS

The level of discrimination that this survey uncovered has shocked many people at Mind, and shows the extent to which stigmas and taboos surrounding mental ill-health affect every area of life including employment, housing, parenting, finances and relationships with family and friends. The findings of this survey raise deep concerns about a large section of the population which is effectively left disenfranchised, and prevented from having a 'stake-hold' in society.

A common feeling amongst the vast majority of people was that of being thrown on the scrap-heap as employees, as parents and as valuable members of society just because of their psychiatric histories.

"The level of discrimination revealed by this report is staggering. It confirms our worst fears- that mental ill-health is the most enduring health taboo, but yet one of the most commonly experienced health problems.

"Discrimination is the single biggest problem for mental health policy. How can people recover and establish themselves in the community if they are constantly refused a chance to work or contribute to society?"

"Despite the fact that one in four people in the UK will have a mental health problem this year, this report uncovers how ingrained, entrenched and debilitating attitudes towards mental ill-health still are."

Judi Clements, Mind's National Director

1 Daily Life - In Public

Almost half (47%) of respondents had been harassed or abused in public because of their mental health problems. Many people had been shouted at in the street and threatened, whilst some had actually been physically attacked.

Some very disturbing threats were made to people, including knife attacks and beatings, but more common were experiences of degrading harassment and bullying in public.

Several people said they had windows broken, or eggs or stones thrown at them. Both local children and adults ridiculed people in public, but more respondents mentioned young people and children as the culprits.

Men were more likely to experience harassment or abuse in public than women -53% of men compared to 40% of women.

Q Have you ever experienced harassment or abuse in public because of your mental health problems?

Yes 47%
Shouted at in the street 29%
Threatened 21%
Physically attacked 14%
Forced to leave premises 16%

By Mind Region/Wales:

Northern	North West	Trent & Yorks	West Mids	South East
42%	55%	44%	50%	46%
South West	Wales			
53%	40%			

"I work very hard at pulling myself out of a depression and then get threatened and abused by a gang of kids on the way home from my first walk Gut in weeks. My son is with me. He is also attacked. I lose credibility in his eyes, and in my own eyes. Mud and stones are thrown at us. Hurt and angry, I think What's the point in trying to get better?"

(Woman aged 43, diagnosed with depression, South East)

"Children have thrown stones at my windows and fruit at me in the street.
(Man aged 41, diagnosed with schizophrenia, Trent & Yorkshire)

"Various gangs in the district call me 'nutter' and spit at me. The gangs on the estate got to know I was a psychiatric out patient so I am teased and harassed."

(Man aged 71, no diagnosis given, North West)

"Strangers come up to me and want to fight me. Being black with mental health problems has affected me."

(Woman aged 31, no diagnosis given, South East)

2 Daily Life - At Home

Over half (57%) of the people felt afraid of attack, with almost as many people actually being harassed or attacked.

At its worst people were living in fear inside their own homes. Some people told of how their flats had been burgled or broken into and one person had lit matches put through their letter box. Others had dogs muck, used condoms and abusive letters stuffed through their front-doors.

Many people said how afraid they felt outside in their local communities. Almost half the people had actually been harassed or attacked at home or in their neighbourhoods, many by neighbours and strangers as well as local children and young people.

Some people had been attacked by their partners and others by their landlords. People in authority including the police and social workers were also mentioned. Some people commented on the harassment they had suffered from other patients and staff when their home was a hospital.

Q Have you ever FELT threatened, or afraid of attack ?

Yes 57%

Inside my own home 25%

Outside in my immediate neighbourhood 34%

By Mind Region/Wales:

Northern	North West	Trent & Yorks	West Mids	South East
51%	65%	61%	55%	56%
South West	Wales			

58%

53%

Q Have you ever actually been harassed or attacked ?

Over a quarter of people said the harassment had been so bad, or they had become so afraid of harassment, that they were forced to move home. Most frequent reasons for moving were harassment by neighbours, splitting up with partners and parents insisting that the person moved out.

Yes 49%

By Neighbours and other tenants 21%

By Strangers 20%

By Landlords (private & public) 7%

By Mind Region/Wales:

Northern	North West	Trent & Yorks	West Mids	South East
----------	------------	---------------	-----------	------------

37%	49%	49%	50%	56%
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

South West	Wales
------------	-------

44%	37%
-----	-----

Q Have you ever been forced to move home because of harassment linked to your mental health problems ?

Yes 26%

By Mind Region/Wales:

Northern	North West	Trent & Yorks	West Mids	South East
----------	------------	---------------	-----------	------------

19%	34%	25%	25%	24%
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

South West	Wales
------------	-------

32%	25%
-----	-----

"I love the small town where I lived, and where my son was born, but I was afraid he would get name called as I often was, so we moved to a larger town where we could be more relaxed and not known. I have suffered more because of ignorance of certain people than I have throughout my actual mental health problems."

(Mother aged 26, diagnosed with clinical depression and psychosis, Trent & Yorkshire)

"My house was broken into five times in six months. I was shouted at and threatened and scared to stay in my house, or go out. I was really scared. I've moved and I hope things will be OK now. Its not fair on us - the people who do this should think. They may need psychiatric help"

themselves one day."

(Woman aged 38, diagnosed with depression, Northern England)

'A friend had a poster saying 'danger paranoid schizophrenic within' pinned to her flat's door."

(Man aged 37, diagnosed with schizophrenia, depression, South East)

"I've had paint on my front door, windows broken, verbal abuse, stones thrown at me by kids on the street, dirty clothes put on my door-step and I've had lit newspaper put through my letterbox."

(Woman aged 50, diagnosed with manic depression, West Midlands)

3 Employment - In Work

The largest problem area in people's lives was that of employment, either trying to return to work, staying in their current jobs, or even getting into work in the first place.

38% of people had been harassed, intimidated or teased at work and 34% of people were forced to resign or dismissed. More men than women complained of harassment - 46% of men compared to 31% of women.

The most intolerant sector appeared to be the health and caring sector, with some of the worst cases of unfair discrimination in nursing and social work.

1 in 5 (20%) of the people who believed that they had been unfairly dismissed from their jobs were nurses, from other caring professions, or other NHS employees.

Other occupations from which people said they had been unfairly sacked included cleaning, library assistant, hod carrier, transport construction, secretarial, nursery nurse, building society clerk, accountancy, garage forecourt attendant, biscuit factory production worker and journalism.

Q Have you ever been harassed, intimidated or teased at work because of your psychiatric history ?

Yes 38%

By Manager 16%

By Colleagues 25%

By Personnel Department 6%
By Other Staff 7%

By Mind Region/Wales:

Northern	North West Trent & Yorks	West Mids	South East
32%	45%	31%	41%
39%			
South West	Wales		
40%	43%		

Q Have you ever been unfairly treated in any of the following ways because of your psychiatric history?

Dismissed or forced to resign 34%
Denied a job 39%
Attempted or threatened dismissal 16%
Denied promotion 15%

Dismissed or forced to resign by Mind Region/Wales:

Northern	North West Trent & York	West Mids	South East
32%	44%	24%	33%
40%			
South West	Wales		
29%	30%		

Q Have you ever had to conceal your psychiatric history for fear of losing your job?

Yes 52%

Northern	North West Trent & Yorks	West Mids	South East
41%	59%	39%	46%
60%			
South West	Wales		
56%	48%		

"I had a cleaning job for three years, but when I mentioned I had an appointment with a psychiatrist I received a letter the next week to say my services were no longer required."

(Woman aged 50, diagnosed with agoraphobia, South East)

"I was employed as a social worker, but after six months I went into

hospital with depression. I received no support from my employer and my contract of employment was terminated despite reports provided by my GF and psychiatrist which stated that my illness didn't affect my work and they were prepared to sign me fit to return to work. My fears about potential discrimination led me to conceal my health problems from my employers and affected my decision to go into hospital. I told the Doctors that if I went into hospital I would lose my job. (This was even described as a 'symptom' of my illness!)"

(Woman aged 33, diagnosed with depression, Wales)

"I am a qualified nurse with lots of experience. Unfortunately I had two years out of work due to anorexia and bulimia caused by a rape. I found it very difficult to obtain a nursing post although I was initially quite open and honest about my illness. Eventually I had to lie about why I had been out of nursing to obtain employment. I have not returned to nursing, at a lower grade prior to being off sick, and work full-time although my employer does not know I have a psychiatric history"

(Woman aged 32, diagnosed with anorexia, bulimia, depression, post traumatic stress disorder, South East)

"Last year I was offered a position as a graduate programmer and I was pleased with the prospect of working in industry using the skills and knowledge I had gathered from my time at university. I was devastated to be told a week later that the offer had been withdrawn because my security clearance was not accepted due to me supposedly suffering a mental illness. I suffered from depression because of a terrible relationship, the death of my fiancée and through being raped. I feel disappointed that people still have no understanding of depression, and differing levels of depression. My details are now stored in a database that thousands of companies use, so my chances of gaining employment with other companies are non-existent."

(Woman aged 26, diagnosed with reactive depression, South West)

"I lost my job because of a period of illness, even though I explained to them that it had been caused by splitting from my husband and starting a new job, and would therefore pass. My employers are a charity who house people with mental health problems. I thought that if even they would not give me a second chance then who will? The fact that I had been working with homeless people for over seven years, that I had

obtained the highest mark in my Honours Degree (Housing and Development) while still having treatment, counted for nothing in comparison to having been diagnosed with a mental health problem."
(Woman aged 34, diagnosed with depression, mixed affective psychosis, South West)

"There is a them and us attitude in social work, where every sympathy is given to the client with a problem, but any staff member who has ever suffered a social problem seems to be expected to write that experience out of their personal history."
(Woman aged 40, diagnosed with personality disorder, Wales)

"I was employed by a local housing association until 1992. When I had my first episode of bad depression they dismissed me as soon as they found out - as if I was an embarrassing problem to be pushed out of the door as soon as possible."
(Woman aged 31, diagnosed with chronic depression, South East)

"On the contrary my two employers in two British multi-nationals, were very understanding and supportive."
(Man aged 64, diagnosed with manic depression, Wales)

4 Unemployment

The vast majority (69%) of people had been put off applying for jobs for fear of unfair treatment. A common experience was of people not being offered jobs, particularly at the stage of medical questions and questionnaires, despite their proven ability to do them.

Other people were prevented from returning to work because of the time off they had to recover from their mental distress, despite medical reports saying that they were fit to return to work.

There were also reports of people being denied places on further education courses and professional training courses, particularly for nursing and other caring qualifications.

Q Have you ever been put off from applying for a job (because you thought you would be unfairly treated because of your psychiatric history)?

Yes 69%

Northern	North West Trent & Yorks	West Mids	South East
54%	80%	59%	72%
South West	Wales		
71%	65%		74%

"On two occasions I lied when I applied for jobs. On both these occasions I said that my two and a half year absence from employment was due to a term spent in prison. I was accepted for the first and short listed for the second. Whenever I have been truthful about my psychiatric past, I have never been accepted for a job."

(Man aged 30, diagnosed with obsessive compulsive disorder, South East)

"I was treated very badly at one particular interview for a clerk/typist in the NHS because they suspected I had a psychiatric 'record' (even though my last experience had been years before). I was totally humiliated. They even stopped the secretary from showing me how the typewriter worked. It is still a painful memory."

(Woman aged 41, diagnosed with personality disorder, obsessional neurosis, South East)

"I applied for a job as a casual librarian (to be paid only for hours worked) and had to fill in a medical form. This asked about seven questions about my medical history, most of which covered only the last five years, but it also asked if i had ever suffered backache or anxiety and depression. It seems absurd to me that a criminal record can be 'spent' when we have to constantly declare our lifelong psychiatric history, which can be painful and distressing in itself and can even stop people seeking help when they are in need of it."

(Woman aged 42, diagnosed with depression, South East)

"I went for a job interview for a secretarial job, with two other candidates. The main criteria for the job was good typing skills, which only I had. I found the written test and typing test fairly easy and during my individual interview I was congratulated on my office skills. The interview was going well until they asked me about my gap in employment. I tried to skirt around it, but was then asked if I had been in hospital. When I mentioned the local psychiatric hospital the interview was quickly brought to a close. I later found out that one of the other applicants got the job, even though she had no office experience. This

was the fourth time this had happened to me.

(Woman aged 53, diagnosed with manic depression, schizophrenia, South East)

"I am annoyed at the stigma behind mental illness, of which I know there still is. I thought it was the age of equal rights, I am just as able-bodied as anybody else but in the past I have found it very difficult to obtain suitable employment."

(Man aged 45, diagnosed with manic depression, Trent & Yorkshire)

"I was doing a nursery nursing course and the person in charge wouldn't let me work with children because I am on anti-depressants."

(Woman aged 23, diagnosed with depression, Wales)

"I was dismissed from a job as a psychiatric nursing assistant in a nursing home, as soon as I declared my history, although they said my work was perfectly satisfactory. I was then refused an interview for a psychiatric nursing course, although I had previously worked in three hospitals and the nursing home, and had a degree. At first the Director of Nursing Studies would not tell me why, but when I pursued the matter and met her face-to-face she said it was because I was 'honest enough' to reveal my previous psychosis."

(Woman aged 38, diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, no address given)

"I was surprised to find a Head of Department Art Lecturer being so prejudiced. He said the college wouldn't consider taking on any other manic depressives, and another lecturer said 'It is all very well for Doctors to tell you to go on college courses, they're not the ones who have to teach you'. I wonder how Van Gogh would have coped with such comments!"

(Woman aged 49, diagnosed with manic depression psychosis, South East)

5 Parenting

38% of parents thought that their ability to look after their child or children had been unfairly questioned because of their history of mental health problems or current problems.

Often this was by social workers and other professional workers, sometimes by partners, other family members or friends.

A couple of people were told not to even consider having children because of their mental health problems.

Parenting ability was an area where the most significant differences between the experience of men and women was apparent. A far greater number of women said their parenting ability was unfairly questioned - 48% of women compared to 26% of men.

Many parents also said that their children had been teased or bullied because of their mental health problems, or they were afraid that they would be.

Q Has your ability to look after your child/children ever been unfairly questioned because of your mental health problems ?

Yes 38%

By Mind Region/Wales:

Northern	North West	Trent & Yorks	West Mids	South East
50%	53%	56%	26%	37%
South West	Wales			
47%	32%			

Q Have any decisions about the custody or access of your children been unfairly influenced by your psychiatric history?

Yes 27%

By Mind Region/Wales:

Northern	North West	Trent & Yorks	West Mids	South East
20%	47%	26%	17%	22%
South West	Wales			
39%	20%			

Q Have your children ever been teased or bullied because of your psychiatric history, or are you afraid that they could be?

Yes 24%

By Mind Region/Wales:

Northern	North West	Trent & Yorks	West Mids	South East
20%	41%	25%	18%	21%
South West	Wales			
32%	10%			

"My children were teased both at school and on the streets near home about my condition. I was referred to as a 'psycho'."
(Mother aged 41, diagnosed with hypomania, North West)

A neighbour once said to one of my children 'Tell your mother to go back to the mental hospital'."
(Mother aged 39, diagnosed with manic depression, Wales)

"My consultant psychiatrist told my husband and I not to have children - 'they will be taken away, no doubt about it'. We now have a beautiful two and a half year old daughter; we are, to quote our GP 'excellent parents', and our care of our daughter is 'always of a high standard'."
(Mother aged 33, diagnosed with schizo-affective disorder, South East)

"I've faced a lot of difficulty when trying to adopt - we've only just got through that and have been accepted as adoptive parents, but I felt unfairly treated. My depression was serious, but I have been well since 1989 and feel that I am going to carry my illness like a millstone around my neck whenever I apply to do anything that involves a medical report."
(Woman aged 36, diagnosed with depression, South East.)

"Due to a lovely letter from my psychiatrist I achieved keeping the children in the divorce."
(Woman aged 41, diagnosed with manic depression, no address given)

"Both my kids have been teased and bullied about their 'madwoman' Mother and my youngest child still is. My inability to do housework and afford to redecorate is the basis for this abuse."
(Mother aged 43, diagnosed with depression, South East)

6 Family & Friends

62% of people had problems with their family and friends at a time when people felt most vulnerable and in need of support and understanding.

Most frequent comments were 'they broke off contact' and 'treated me with less

respect'. Others mentioned being expected to 'pull themselves together'. Some people lost support initially, and some found that friends and relatives broke off contact completely

More women complained about the reactions of their family and friends - 69% of women compared to 56% of men.

Q Have any of your family or friends treated you unfairly because of your mental health problems ?

Yes 62%

By Parents 28%

By Sisters/Brothers 25%

By Partner 24%

By Friends 24%

By Extended Family 12%

By Children 9%

By Mind Region/Wales:

Northern	North West	Trent & Yorks	West Mids	South East
----------	------------	---------------	-----------	------------

43%	73%	56%	47%	62%
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

South West	Wales
------------	-------

70%	70%
-----	-----

"Because I have spent some time in a psychiatric hospital, friends have now become distant and my family cannot understand that when you are depressed you cannot just 'pull yourself together'."

(Woman aged 34, diagnosed with depression, South West)

"Friends avoided me and would not let their children play with my children anymore."

(Woman aged 36, diagnosed with anxiety, depression, personality disorder, South East)

"People are frightened so they shun us to cover their ignorance. People are scared of mental disorder which makes us lonely and isolated."
(Man aged 52, diagnosed with personality disorder, South West)

"My partner said 'they should lock you up and throw away the key' and my mother said she wished she had had an abortion and then she cut me out of her will."
(Woman aged 49, diagnosed with manic depression, Tr. & Yorkshire)

"I have had numerous occasions where people have got to know me for who I am, and accepted me and have found no major objection to me. After mentioning, or them discovering, that I have experienced mental distress during my life, I have been pained to notice a marked withdrawal of their acceptance. In its place I have noticed suspicion, fear, distrust, a reduction of respect, an interest in seeing a 'problem' in me and a reluctance to identify with me."
(Woman aged 31, diagnosed with schizo-affective disorder, South East)

"The most upsetting thing that I found after my breakdown was losing my friends. They just did not want to know me anymore. I suppose they did not understand why I was acting weird and rejected me. I was very lonely after that."
(Woman, diagnosed with schizophrenia, no address given)

7 Finances

25% of people who had applied for insurance company or finance company policies, had been turned down because of a psychiatric diagnosis.

This figure would have been higher but many people said that they had not bothered to apply because they expected to be turned down or had lied about their psychiatric histories. Others had been charged unfairly high premiums or had to accept additional exclusion clauses.

Of those people who did apply, and were refused a policy, life insurance had caused the most difficulty, followed by health insurance, car insurance, and bank or building society loans and holiday insurance was also mentioned.

Q Have you ever been turned down by an insurance or finance company because of a psychiatric diagnosis ?

Yes 25%

"Insurance is impossible - it's arranged so that you can't get any cover unless you pay exorbitant premiums, or there are so many 'get out' clauses included that it's useless anyway. This means I am excluded from making proper provisions for my wife and children if I die."

(Man, South East)

"I applied for life insurance. The first question asked if I was on medication, or had any on-going treatment, or if I had been in hospital before. I didn't bother returning the form."

(Woman aged 37, diagnosed with depression/anxiety, Wales)

"I have not even tried to get insurance, as my insurers in the past have put additional costs onto policies because of my background."

(Woman aged 31, diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, South West)

8 Health Services (Non-Psychiatric)

50% of people said they had been unfairly treated by general health care services, because of their psychiatric history or current diagnosis.

Many more women complained of the way they were treated than men - 58% of women compared to 41% of men.

Significant numbers of people complained that their GP had treated them unfairly. 40% of women and 26% of men. The most common comment was that health care staff did not believe people's reports of physical ailments.

Q Do you feel that you have ever been unfairly treated by general health care services because of your psychiatric history or diagnosis ?

Yes 50%

By GP 33%

By General hospital 26%

By Clinics 11%

By Mind Region/Wales:

Northern North West Trent & Yorks West Mids South East

39% 69% 46% 51% 48%
South West Wales
47% 55%

"I suffered from severe general health problems for several years - no-one would listen and everything was put down to my mental health problems. I eventually received help when I was severely ill on holiday. This time I was immediately listened to and my problem diagnosed. This resulted in major abdominal surgery (much more major than if it had been diagnosed earlier). It also transpired that the poisoning of my system from my general health problems was causing or exacerbating my mental health problems."

(Woman aged 44, diagnosed with bipolar affective disorder, no address given)

"I went to my GP with a breast lump - he said 'come back if it gets bigger'. I insisted on a referral to a breast specialist. My GP sent a referral stating 'over-anxious patient, had nervous breakdown at age 17' (20 years ago!) Consequently I was greeted by the specialist with 'well, you're a bit of a worrier aren't you?'. Because of this reference in my hospital notes, when I became seriously ill with a lung clot, they dismissed me as a hypochondriac for weeks until I became very ill. Every physical illness I have had for the last 20 years has first been dismissed as anxiety', depression or stress."

(Woman aged 38, no diagnosis given, Wales)

"My GP is very sympathetic as he suffered depression in the recent past."
(Man aged 46, diagnosed with depression, anxiety, panic attacks, South West)

"When my daughter died I approached my GP. She refused to recognise my grief and realised they were not seeing me as a bereaved mother, but as a 'mad' woman whose baby had died."

(Woman, diagnosed with personality disorder, no address given)

"I moved when I was eight months pregnant and my midwife wrote 'hypomaniac' in large red letters across my notes, even though I had been well for some time. No GP in my new area would take me on."

(Woman aged 41, diagnosed with hypomania, North West)

9 Causes of Discrimination

We asked people if they had personally seen an increase or decrease in discrimination over the last five years. The results suggest that the situation is getting worse. When the 'don't knows' were excluded, 45% of the remainder said discrimination was getting worse, only 18% thought it had decreased, with 37% saying it had stayed the same.

We also asked people who, or what, they blamed for this discrimination, giving five options. The results show constructive and thoughtful answers. People did not just want to point a finger and apportion blame, but were looking for reasons for stigma and discrimination and for answers.

Lack of public education and media stories were given as the main reasons for the discrimination, with people complaining that negative images were still being promoted, which allowed the stigma to continue.

Q Have you observed an increase or decrease in discrimination over the last five years?

Increased 45%
 Stayed the same 37%
 Decreased 18%

By Mind Region/Wales:

	Increased	Stayed same	Decreased
Northern	48%	48%	3%
North West	40%	43%	17%
Trent & Yorks	43%	36%	21%
West Mids	40%	35%	26%
South East	41%	39%	19%
South West	46%	32%	23%
Wales	57%	32%	11%

Q Who, or what, do you blame for this discrimination?

Personal prejudices 49%
 Lack of public education 66%
 Fears 48%
 Media stories 60%

Politicians 22%

"The general public should see the people with a psychiatric record living in the community successfully and not just see the sad side. Public education would help."

(Woman aged 33, diagnosed with schizophrenia, South West)

"If people were made aware at school it would hopefully eliminate some of the fears and myths which are around. I've done several talks to raise awareness. To start with I see that people are not sure of me, then as I talk and look like everybody else they accept me and learn."

(Woman, West Midlands)

"There are lots of people who come to grips with mental health problems (myself included) and who manage an adequate lifestyle. Mass media always concentrate on the 'doom and gloom' attitude and give a very bad press."

(Woman, South East)

"Our local MP put a story headlined 'Are they Safe ?' in the local paper, about the proposed opening of a crisis house. He hadn't checked his facts or consulted anyone involved. He was challenged about this, and he hasn't commented publicly on mental health issues since!"

(Woman aged 41, diagnosed with clinical depression, Wales)

"I find I conceal the information about my illness, rather than risk rejection, which means I feel ashamed and miss opportunities to increase other people's knowledge of mental illness - so the stigma and taboos are perpetuated."

(Woman aged 32, diagnosed with manic depression, South East)

"Isn't it about time people accepted that we are all vulnerable to mental-ill health, especially now in the 90s when the pace of life and stress levels are so great? The mind is just like any other part of the body - just because of a short-term illness, it doesn't mean it's not going to recover. A builder isn't refused a job if they once had a broken arm, so why should a person who has suffered short-term depression be denied a job?"

(Woman aged 26, diagnosed with reactive depression,
South West)

"I am a well person these days, with a good job in the academic world yet I do

not disclose anything about my depression for fear of discrimination. I hate this because I like to be truthful, but my experiences in trying to gain other employment, and with various other 'professionals' along the way, have made me very careful. I'd love to stand up and tell my story because there is a lot to tell and it has a happy ending, but I believe mental illness still has such a lot of stigma attached to it that I would have nothing to gain by it and an awful lot to lose."
(Anonymous)

Mind
15-19 Broadway
London E15 4BQ

Tel: 0181 519 2122