



PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

OLDER PEOPLE CAN BE LEFT ISOLATED IF THEY EXPERIENCE MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

SCOTLAND'S older generations can be left isolated if they experience mental health problems, according to a new project.

Age in Mind is working to identify and reduce the discrimination faced by people over 50 who have experienced mental health problems.

So far the research has found the older generations experiencing mental health problems are faced with isolation, in some cases their families have abandoned them or live too far away to make regular visits.

For some who have experienced severe and enduring mental health conditions in their younger life, they were even denied the opportunity to start families of their own, meaning they have less support in later life, relying on extended families.

They also report increased discrimination within the health system, with limited mental health services available for people when they are over 65.

The project is being led by the Scottish Mental Health Cooperative, and has been funded by See Me, Scotland's national programme to end mental health stigma.

Over 160 people with lived experience of mental health problems, and over 50 organisations which support people with their mental health needs have taken part in focus groups, interviews and questionnaires to establish what discrimination people have faced, and where work needs to be done.

Dianna Manson, from Edinburgh, said people who spent their younger years in asylums were often not allowed to start their own families, impacting on the support they have in later life.

The 68 year old, who has been diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, said: "People who have experienced mental health problems absolutely find themselves far more isolated as they get older. The reason for this is usually your family have disappeared out of your life.

"People of my generation who were in asylums were denied the opportunity to start our own families.

"If we had children they were taken away as children would not be kept with a parent with a mental health problem.

"So we are very much on our own and if we need to rely on people it is extended family. Friends we have made through our lives have often been other service users and we can't keep in touch."

David Sinclair 72 from Glasgow, who was diagnosed with schizophrenia in 1965 although never given medication, said: "I certainly have faced stigma and isolation.

"Being out of contact with people is a large issue, you feel outside the world, you can be stigmatised by family members and neighbours think you are part of a different generation so don't bother.

"I don't mention my mental health at all outside, you get stigmatised as soon as you open your mouth, you see the barriers coming down.

"I have faced stigma within my family, you feel like you are a secondary concern, younger generations don't look after older generations enough, especially if you have a mental health problem."

David Delaney, chair of the Scottish Mental Health Cooperative said: "Our members are all providing community-based mental health services to people across all ages, but we see how those with long term conditions are now growing older and the impact that mental health stigma and discrimination over many decades, has had on their lives.

"As they reflect back on what mental health care has been in the past, we need to learn from their experiences for future generations so that we do not replicate similar situations but rather show ourselves to be a caring and understanding society and relegate stigma and discrimination to the past."

Angela Dias, the change network office running the project, said: "From the research we have found the main discrimination older generations face is from family members.

"It is a complicated issue and mental health problems are difficult for everyone involved. People are worried that if they say or do the wrong thing they can make a problem worse.

"But family members can help to reduce stigma and loneliness for people just by being there, listening to what someone has to say and not judging.

"Outside of families we want to use this research to influence service areas where discrimination is taking place, including policy and practice nationally and locally."

Calum Irving, See Me's director, said: "This project is developing a picture of what stigma and discrimination can be like for older generations in Scotland.

"As a society we need to value older people in this country. If they are isolated then there needs to be better infrastructure in place to provide support so people aren't alone.

"People experiencing mental health problems need help and support quickly, no matter what their age their mental health needs to be taken seriously."

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NOTES TO EDITORS

1. Age in Mind, is a three-year project, worked in partnership with See Me and supported by the Scottish Older People's Assembly, Age Scotland, and many local organisations.
2. See Me is Scotland's National programme to end mental health stigma and discrimination, enabling people who experience mental health problems to live fulfilled lives.

We do this by:

- Mobilising people to work together and lead a movement to end mental health stigma and discrimination
 - Working with people to change negative behaviour towards those with mental health problems
 - Ensuring that the human rights of people with mental health problems are respected and upheld
3. Follow See Me on Twitter @seemescotland or find us on Facebook: Facebook/seemescotland or at www.seemescotland.org
 4. The Scottish Mental Health Cooperative comprises of local mental health organisations in Scotland which provide independent community based support to people experiencing mental health difficulties, their families and carers.
 5. Follow Age in Mind at <https://twitter.com/ageinmind>

