

People with mental health problems hit harder by recession

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Since the start of the recession, the rate of unemployment for people with mental health problems has risen more than twice as much than for people without mental health problems, according to new research from King's College London.

The authors warn that, across Europe, people with [mental health problems](#) have been disproportionately affected by the [economic crisis](#), further increasing social exclusion amongst this vulnerable group.

Published in *PLoS ONE*, the study also found that this gap in employment rates was even greater for men and for those with low levels of education.

The scientists collected data in 27 EU countries from over 20,000 people in 2006 and again in 2010. By using the Eurobarometer survey, they assessed mental health, stigmatising attitudes, socio-demographic information (such as age, gender, education level and urbanicity) and current employment rate.

In 2006, unemployment was at 7.1% for people without mental health problems, compared to 12.7% for people with mental health problems. In 2010, this rose to 9.8% and 18.2% respectively, corresponding to an increase of 5.5% for people with mental health problems vs 2.7% increase for people without mental health problems.

Dr Sara Evans-Lacko, lead author of the study from King's College

London's Institute of Psychiatry, says: "The [economic recession](#) has had enormous impact across much of Europe, but there is little information about the specific impact of the recession on groups who are already vulnerable to social exclusion, specifically, people with mental health problems. This is the first study to show that the European economic crisis has had a profound impact on people with mental health problems, compared to those without."

In addition, the study identified important sub-groups – for example, the study found that men and individuals with lower levels of education had a significantly greater increase in the likelihood of being unemployed after the recession. In 2010, 21.7% of men with mental health problems were unemployed, compared to 13.7% in 2006.

The study also showed that stigmatising attitudes, especially beliefs regarding dangerousness of people with mental health problems were an important factor contributing to the rise in unemployment. Living in a country where a higher proportion of individuals believed that people with mental health problems were dangerous was associated with higher levels of unemployment for people with mental health problems.

In addition to having lower levels of employment, these subgroups also have lower rates of help-seeking and more negative attitudes to mental health and may require specific forms of outreach.

Professor Graham Thornicroft, co-author of the study from King's College London's Institute of Psychiatry, adds: "Our study emphasises that one important implication of stigma and discrimination is exclusion from employment. During periods of economic recession, attitudes to people with mental health problems may harden, further deepening social exclusion. Governments need to be aware of these risks, and employers need to be aware of their legal duty to comply with the Equality Act to support people with [mental health](#) problems coming into,

and staying in, employment."

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Provided by King's College London

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