

Debt linked to mental health problems

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New research, led by the University of Southampton, has shown that people in debt are three times more likely to have a mental health problem than those not in debt.

There is currently around £156 billion in unsecured debt such as [credit cards](#) in the UK, of which the average family owes more than £11,000. Levels of debt have increased in recent years due to the [economic recession](#) and are predicted to increase further.

Researchers from the University of Southampton, along with a researcher from Kingston University, carried out a systematic review on all previous research which looked at the relationship between health problems and unsecured debt. They conducted a 'meta-analysis', the first time this has been done on the issue, to statistically combine the results of previous studies involving nearly 34,000 participants.

The results, published online in *Clinical Psychology Review*, showed that those in debt were more than three times more likely to have a mental health problem as those who were not in debt.

Less than nine per cent of participants with no mental health problems were in debt, compared to more than a quarter of participants being in debt and with a mental health problem.

The team found that those in debt were also more likely to suffer from depression, [drug dependence](#) and [psychosis](#) and the results also suggest that those who die by suicide are more likely to be in debt.

Dr Thomas Richardson, Clinical Psychologist from the University of Southampton who led the research, comments: "This research shows a strong relationship between debt and mental health; however it is hard to say which causes which at this stage. It might be that debt leads to worse mental health due to the stress it causes. It may also be that those with mental health problems are more prone to debt because of other factors, such as erratic employment. Equally it might be that the relationship works both ways. For example people who are depressed may struggle to cope financially and get into debt, which then sends them deeper into depression.

"Debt advisors should consider asking about mental health when speaking to members of the public. Similarly mental health professionals should ensure they ask about whether their patients are in debt. Further research is now needed to show exactly how debt leads to poor mental health, so that interventions can be designed to try and prevent those in financial trouble developing [mental health problems](#) and vice versa."

Provided by University of Southampton

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