

Austerity Britain leads to anxiety, abortions and alcohol abuse

Submitted by: Inking (FKA The Media Foundry)

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AUSTERITY BRITAIN LEADS TO ANXIETY, ABORTIONS & ALCOHOL ABUSE

New research from UK GPs reveals economic climate's negative impact on our health

A new report launched today suggests serious effects on the UK population's health caused by the recession. An overwhelming 76% of GPs questioned in the survey said they believed the economic downturn was making people in the UK unhealthier.

The opinion survey, designed and run by global healthcare market research specialist Insight Research Group (<http://www.insightrg.com>), clearly highlights that doctors believe these tough times have affected all social groups but particularly the middle class. According to the GPs in the survey this has led to an increase in abortions, anxiety and alcohol abuse, as well as a rise in Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) particularly in women.

The impact on family planning

Over a third (34%) of the 300 GPs surveyed believed there was an increase in patients putting off starting a family until their financial security improves, with nearly a fifth (17%) believing patients specifically requested terminations due to financial concerns.

The impact on mental health

Over three quarters (77%) of the 300 GPs surveyed felt there has been an increase in new cases of mental health disorders linked to the stresses of the economic climate. Of the 231 GPs who mention mental health, over half (54%) believed the biggest increase has been in clinically definable anxiety (including OCD, anxiety and panic disorders), particularly amongst men – a surprising statistic as this disorder is usually associated with women.

The impact on general well-being: drinking, smoking and sports

The majority (64%) of the 300 GPs surveyed felt there was an increase in patients drinking more alcohol, and almost half (46%) believed they'd seen an increase in serious alcohol abuse. When it came to smoking, over a third (38%) of the 300 GPs surveyed believed that more of their smoking-prone patients were giving up or cutting down to save money. People also appear to be taking less care of themselves when it comes to exercise. Nearly two thirds (60%) of the 300 GPs surveyed believed that more patients were cancelling sporting activities to save money, with more than half (54%) saying their reduction of exercise is because of increased pressures at work.

Whose health has been worst affected in the recession?

- The greatest increase in new cases of mental health disorders as a result of the economic downturn is believed to be amongst those aged between 36 to 45 (49%), and those who have kids and are married or living with their partner (58%).

- When it comes to gender breakdown, GPs believed there to be higher increases of depression, anxiety and alcohol abuse amongst men.
- The only condition where GPs felt women experienced the greatest increase in new cases since the 2008 recession is Irritable Bowel Syndrome (66% versus 19% in men).

The impact on the frontline of the NHS - GPs

When it came to the impact of the recession on GPs themselves and their practices, the results were shocking. Of the 231 GPs who believed there to be an increase in mental health disorders, almost every one (96%) said these patients require longer appointment times, with 83% revealing that this condition has had an impact on their practice. When questioned further, 60% of these GPs also reported working longer hours as a result of dealing with this increased case load. Nearly the same (59%) said that they struggle to refer patients with mental health disorders into the services best placed to support them, with some saying it could take up to a year before patients are seen by a psychologist.

Industry reaction

Richard Kunzmann, Research Manager at Insight Research Group, who has lead the research for the last six months, comments: "The last four years have been tough for everyone. Although we assumed that increased workloads and financial worries had affected the nation's health to a certain extent, we wanted to hear from GPs about what they believed was happening on the ground based on their daily experiences in their practices. The results are particularly insightful and show the extent to which the economy is not only affecting the average person on the street but also the GPs that treat them."

"The GPs we surveyed felt that worries over financial security coupled with many people working longer hours have raised our stress levels. This has not only led to an increase in various mental health disorders but has also influenced other aspects of our life and wellbeing – from family planning through to levels of exercise. The middle class has been especially affected by the turbulence of the economic recession – amongst all of the conditions that were investigated, GPs routinely associated the increases they've seen with middle Britain. But these pressures are not limited to one demographic either – married women and single women were both as likely to request a termination due to financial concerns. It's a particularly tough challenge for time-poor GPs who are faced with many patients who just need someone to talk to. Their only real option in the immediate term is to prescribe medication, which of course is rarely the solution."

Ann Furedi, Chief Executive of the BPAS (British Pregnancy Advisory Service) adds: "Financial circumstances often play a role in women's decision-making when faced with an unplanned pregnancy, and against the backdrop of a recession, it is not surprising that some doctors are reporting an increase in the number of women considering abortion because of their financial predicament. At a national level, the rate of abortion for the under-25s has fallen and that for the older age groups increased, and the survey results reflect this trend."

“Ultimately motherhood is something we take extremely seriously, and many women want to wait until their circumstances are right – financially secure and in their own home - before having a baby or indeed adding to an existing family. Women need abortion as a back-up for when contraception fails so they can ensure the timing and size of their families is what is right for them and their own personal circumstances.”

As you might expect, the report goes on to reveal that the biggest increase in depression has been amongst the recently unemployed but overall a similar number of new cases of mental health disorders were reported by employed and unemployed people alike. Work related anxiety has been a growing trend among the employed, meaning that their patient's employment status isn't enough to spare them from recession woes.

The survey gathered the opinions of 300 GPs from across the UK about how Britain's health has been affected by the turbulent economy since 2008 based on their experiences with patients. In addition, the research included over 40 in-depth qualitative interviews undertaken through Insight's online GP community, e-Village. To differentiate between general health trends and specifically the impact of the economic recession, GPs were asked to only consider those instances where patients linked their behaviours and/or conditions with financial hardship or concerns about job security during their health visit.

For a full copy of the report please visit: <http://www.insightrg.com/austerity-britain/>.

Ends

Notes to Editors

Insight Research Group ran an online survey of 300 GPs across the UK, with a proportional distribution across the strategic health authority areas, between 27th April 2012 and 18th May 2012. Alongside the survey, over 40 in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with GPs on Insight Research Group's eVillage – a research community run with healthcare professionals – to inform the design of the survey and validate its findings.

About Insight Research Group

Global marketing research agency, Insight Research Group has offices in Central London, UK and Midtown Manhattan, US. Insight operates UK and international divisions focused on global healthcare marketing research. The 120-strong research group, founded in 1983 also co-founded the Cello group in 2004 and is the largest business within the group. Insight works with some of the world's largest pharmaceutical companies, including Astra Zeneca, Pfizer International and GlaxoSmithKline.
www.insightrg.com

Sam Woodward
sam.woodward@themediafoundry.com
0207 612 1118