

A catastrophic indifference to human need: the mental health crisis created by the DWP

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Ten years after the adoption of austerity measures, added to social policy reforms, why are those in greatest need living in fear of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)? Why were social policy reforms adopted that were guaranteed to kill many, including government imposed financial sanctions which led to some of those in greatest need actually starving to death in C21st UK; with no-one it seems objecting to this government enforced tyranny.^{1,2,3}

Whilst the world is distracted by the Covid-19 pandemic, and the UK is distracted by the impending consequences of Brexit, an ongoing public mental health crisis is being totally overlooked.¹ It is the DWP who created this mental health crisis with the adoption of extreme social policy reforms, together with the additional brutal austerity measures since 2010. This guaranteed the creation of preventable harm as the chronically ill and disabled community were coerced and intimidated by the DWP,² using psychological tyranny to limit the number of successful disability benefit claimants.³ A mental health crisis was inevitable, as demonstrated by Catherine Hale in the 'Fulfilling Potential?'⁴ project, supported by MIND and the Centre for Welfare Reform:

“The worst thing, I find, is realising that I am forced into looking for a life that I want but have no chance of having. I seriously feel I may kill myself because being sick, having next to no money, no life, no future, no cure, constant pain and constant disapproval and rejection defeats me.”⁴

During ten years of independent disability studies research, the Preventable Harm Project (the Project) established that all social policy reforms since 1992 were influenced by corporate America; with the ultimate political ambition being the removal of the UK welfare state to be replaced by the American system of welfare, funded by private health insurance. This political ambition enjoys bipartisan support.

The Project established that in order to remove the welfare state, it was first necessary to remove the psychological security provided by the welfare state. With regard to the chronically ill and disabled community who are unfit to work, the removal of psychological security was quickly achieved by the adoption of the fatally flawed Work Capability Assessment (WCA), as used by the DWP since 2008 to limit access to the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and additional long-term disability benefits. The Waddell-Aylward biopsychosocial (BPS) model of assessment,⁵ which disregards all clinical opinion, was adopted for the WCA despite the model having failed all academic scrutiny.

The Waddell-Aylward research was exposed by academic excellence as having '*no coherent theory or evidence behind this model.*'⁶ The critique highlighted the fact that the researchers relied '*on unevidenced assertions throughout their work*',⁶ and concluded that '*the relationship of the advocates of the Waddell-Aylward BPS [model] to the UK government's 'welfare reform' does not represent evidence-based policy. Rather, it offers a chilling example of policy-based evidence.*'⁶

The BPS model of assessment is the invention of the health insurance industry, adopted to limit funding health insurance claims in the US. The chronically ill and disabled community are aware of the adoption of the BPS assessment by the DWP, used to limit access to disability benefits.^{7,8,9} Successive UK administrations justified the adoption of the fatally flawed WCA due to fiscal priorities, whilst disregarding health and wellbeing,^{7,10} and they successfully created a mental health crisis that few are reporting.

Suicides linked to the WCA have increased. Relentless thoughts of suicide are linked with the assessments, with published research evidence which identifies the negative impact of the WCA continually dismissed by the DWP, who refuse to conduct a cumulative impact assessment regarding the impact of social policy reforms since 2010.

Footnotes

- Author of *Cash Not Care: the planned demolition of the UK welfare state*. London, New Generation Publishing, 2016

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<https://www.centreforwelfarereform.org/about-us/centre-fellows/mo-stewart.html>

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