



To: Steve Barclay MP

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From: Mo Stewart - Research Lead, Preventable Harm Project

RESEARCH BRIEFING: THE FINDINGS OF THE PREVENTABLE HARM PROJECT (2009-2019)

PROJECT SUMMARY

As the research lead for the [Preventable Harm Project](#),¹ I have regularly alerted you to the identified public health crisis created by successive social policy 'reforms,' as adopted by every UK administration since 2008 and significantly increased since 2010. This public health crisis² identifies not only a matter of ideology with a devotion to right-leaning neoliberal politics but it also highlights the loss of humanity, which is demonstrably missing from successive social policies relating to the chronically ill and disabled community who are unfit to work and whose financial survival, and often their physical survival, is totally dependent upon accessing social security benefits via the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

At our past meeting you claimed to have read almost everything I'd then written and that you agreed with the research findings, but you believed that there would be no change in this DWP generated human suffering as it was a matter of statute. However, given that the coalition administration spent 5 years 'reforming' social policies (2010-2015), which were further extended by subsequent administrations, it is clear that what is missing is a political will to end this human suffering generated by the continued use of the fatally flawed Work Capability Assessment (WCA),^{1,2,3} as initially adopted to limit access to the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) long-term disability benefit. The WCA is based on a fiscal priority whilst disregarding the health and wellbeing of those in greatest need.³ This created disability denial as the political basis for social policy reforms -vely impacting on the disabled community. This is disturbing. The DWP continue to disregard all published research by a multitude of academics demonstrating the thousands of deaths directly linked to the WCA, and the public health crisis it was always destined to generate.^{2,3}

It is also cause for serious concern that the DWP failed to conduct any impact assessment prior to the adoption of the WCA, or had any plans to evaluate its effects,³ which is usually mandatory for social policies which have the potential to -vely impact on millions of people's lives. This was the introduction of disability denial, with disability benefit claimants routinely treated with hostility, disrespect and contempt.⁴ The WCA was adopted using the discredited Waddell-Aylward biopsychosocial (BPS) model of assessment that disregards clinical need. The Waddell-Aylward BPS model failed all academic scrutiny, and was demonstrated as being '*policy-based research*',⁵ which guaranteed that deaths would be inevitable as the WCA is identified as a '*non-medical functional assessment*'² and so diagnosis, prognosis and past medical history are all disregarded during the assessment. **This is dangerous.**

Indeed, DWP commissioned research, and reports by right leaning think-tanks that claim to influence social policies, have a tendency to limit references to past DWP documents. Detailed published peer-reviewed research, which identifies the public health crisis generated by the WCA, are constantly disregarded. Since 2015, the DWP have refused to publish updated mortality totals for the numbers of claimants who died after being rejected for access to the ESA following a WCA. This demonstrates the resistance by the DWP of being held to account for the thousands of ESA claimant deaths linked to the WCA and the reassessment process. This ongoing intimidation of those in greatest need is politically motivated and should end. If not, many more disabled people will die when covertly killed by the state.²



PUBLISHED RESEARCH DEMONSTRATING THE PREVENTABLE HARM CREATED BY THE WCA

The WCA was initially adopted in October 2008 to limit access to the new ESA disability benefit. As long ago as 2011 Dr Kayleigh Garthwaite began producing evidence of the identified preventable harm created by the DWP, whose ministerial team in the coalition administration felt the need to publicly humiliate and demonise anyone claiming long-term out-of-work disability benefit.⁶ Their rhetoric worked well as disability hate crimes coincidentally increased by 213% during the coalition administration's term in office.⁷ Kayleigh continued to demonstrate the fear created by the WCA and the reassessment process in an additional research paper, as published in December 2014⁸ and, with colleagues, Kayleigh's research was again published in 2014⁹ exposing the public health crisis created by the contracting of an unaccountable corporate giant to conduct the flawed WCA at great public expense. Suicides were always inevitable.¹⁰

“The findings highlight the systematic, intersectional and cumulative production of suicidality by government “welfare reform” in the UK, through positioning welfare claimants as “burdens” on society. They show that by locating the problem as burdensomeness in individual “misperceptions”, the Interpersonal Theory allows the government’s role in crafting the stigmatisation and conditions of suicidality to be overlooked and to be reproduced. The article raises urgent ethical questions about the application of approaches, such as the Interpersonal Theory of Suicide, to benefits-related suicides and calls for approaches to benefits-related harm and suicide to be rooted in social and disability justice.”¹⁰

Professor Peter Dwyer is a distinguished academic in social policy and social work, who led a research project at the University of York for almost 6 years, exposing the crisis created by the increased and excessive use of welfare conditionality which negatively impacted on the wellbeing of benefit claimants.^{11,12} There are many more distinguished academics who, over the years, have demonstrated the public health crisis created by successive social policy reforms and, if you access the Preventable Harm Project¹ you will access a multitude of published peer-reviewed academic papers, reproduced online with permission, which invariably demonstrate the persecution of disability benefit claimants by successive administrations, which was guaranteed to create a public health crisis for those in greatest need. I have endeavoured to identify these findings in my most recent published research.^{13,14,15}

There is an identified, ongoing and increasing public health crisis in the UK linked to the WCA, with one NHS report advising that almost 50% of ESA claimants had attempted suicide at some point.¹⁶ This is clearly an example of preventable harm adopted by successive UK administrations, and I suggest it is past time for much stronger political protests to be identified to end this persecution of those in greatest need. A vast amount of evidence exposes a public health crisis linked to the WCA that should be abolished.^{14,17}

“Death has become a part of Britain’s benefit system. Shredding the safety net – a mix of sanctions, defective ‘fit for work’ tests, and outright cuts to multiple services – has meant that benefit claimants are dying; through suicide, starvation, and even being crushed by a refuse lorry when a 17-week benefit sanction forced a man to scavenge in a bin for food. This morning, the government released mortality statistics – or rather, was forced to after several freedom of information requests that show that more than 80 people a month are dying after being declared ‘fit for work’... The welfare state was built on the idea of ‘the cradle to the grave’. Now for thousands all they receive is help to that grave.”¹⁷



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