



Mo Stewart Research

Fellow, Centre for Welfare Reform
Research Lead, Preventable Harm Project

Phone: xxxxx xxxxxx

Text: xxxxxxxxxxxx

Email: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Date: 8th May 2025

[Mo Stewart Research | Cash Not Care](#)

Dr Charlotte Refsum
Director of Health Policy
Tony Blair Institute for Global Change
One Bartholomew Close
London
EX1A 7BL

via email

Dear Dr Refsum,

Re: [Data Decoded: Charting the Trends and Costs of Declining Mental Health in the UK¹](#)

I write in my capacity as the research lead for the Preventable Harm Project² to thank you and your colleagues for the above commentary regarding the identified declining mental health in the UK.

I confess I was surprised when the opening statement advised that the reasons behind this growing public mental health crisis in the UK 'remain unclear,'¹ given that there is a vast amount of published evidence demonstrating a significant factor in the rising mental health crisis is the impact of punitive social policy reforms, ongoing since 2010, and negatively impacting those in greatest need.³⁻¹¹

¹ [Data Decoded: Charting the Trends and Costs of Declining Mental Health in the UK](#)

² [The Preventable Harm Project](#)

³ [The public health crisis created by UK social policy reforms: *Justice, Power and Resistance* 6 \(2\) 217-228](#)

⁴ [Preventable harm: creating a mental health crisis: *Journal of Public Mental Health* 18 \(4\) 224-230](#)

⁵ ['First do no harm': *J Epidemiol Community Health* 2016; 70: 339-345](#)

⁶ [Psychological tyranny prescribed by the DWP: preventable harm is government policy. *BJGP* 68 \(677\): 579](#)

⁷ [Mortality statistics: Employment and Support Allowance, Incapacity Benefit or Severe Disablement Allowance](#)

⁸ ['Shocking' NHS stats show nearly half ESA claimants have attempted suicide – Disability News Service](#)

⁹ [Benefit cuts risk harming mental health. *Transforming Society*, 15 April 2025](#)

¹⁰ [Dismantling the social safety net: social security reforms, disability and mental health conditions *BJPsych Bulletin* 44\(5\): 208-212](#)

¹¹ [Fear of the Brown Envelope: Exploring Welfare Reform with Long-Term Sickness Benefits Recipients *Social and Policy Administration* 48\(7\): 782-798](#)



The suggested ‘distorted financial incentives within the system, overdiagnosis or changing public attitudes and awareness around mental health’¹ are all claims made by successive neoliberal UK administrations, who accept no responsibility for the identified and well-documented growing public mental health crisis directly linked to the hostility of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), whose intimidation in letters and commentary seems to know no bounds and has been well-documented over a long period of time.¹¹⁻¹⁵

‘There is a tendency for the DWP to disregard the 2016 NHS report, which was never reported to the media, and which exposed the fact that almost half of all claimants of the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) disability benefit had attempted suicide. Given the significance of these disturbing figures, it is of serious concern that the administration failed to acknowledge the public health crisis generated by the ESA assessment, using the fatally flawed Work Capability Assessment (WCA), and the deaths linked to the WCA when claimants are found ‘fit for work’ have not been published by the DWP since 2015.’¹⁵

As long ago as 2015, the DWP’s own figures identified a total of 2,380 deaths of chronically ill and disabled claimants in 26 months, many by suicide, when refused access to financial help by the totally discredited WCA. I therefore suggest that being intimidated by the State is linked to the identified and increasing government-induced public mental health crisis.¹⁵

Table 1: DWP mortality statistics, ESA claimants: December 2011 - February 2014, published August 2015

WCA outcome at most recent ESA assessment, Dec 2011 – Feb 2014	Number of claimants leaving ESA with a recorded date of death
Fit for work	2,380
Work related activity group	7,200
Assessment phase	7,570
Support group	32,530
Unknown	930
TOTAL	50,580

Source: Evidence from DWP mortality statistics, 2015. Table created by the author.¹⁵

If you consider the published evidence from a wider selection of data, there is no confusion why ‘the incidence of depression in adults doubled in the eight years between 2014 – 2022.’¹ This significant increase in depression coincided with the impact of successive social policy

¹ [Data Decoded: Charting the Trends and Costs of Declining Mental Health in the UK](#)

¹¹ [Fear of the Brown Envelope: Exploring Welfare Reform with Long-Term Sickness Benefits Recipients](#)
Social and Policy Administration 48(7): 782-798

¹² [tip-of-the-iceberg.pdf](#)

¹³ [Killed By The Sate: Social Policy Abused, hosted by the Centre for Welfare Reform, 2020](#)

¹⁴ [An Independent Advisory Panel on DWP-Related Deaths](#)

¹⁵ [Pathways-to-Work-DWP-open-consultation-2025.pdf](#)



reforms, the impact of ‘austerity’ adopted by the Coalition administration (2010 – 2015) and the continued DWP hostility towards those in greatest need following the election of successive Conservative governments (2015-2022). This identified hostility continues with the recently elected Labour administration and more people will suffer, which is a political choice.

The ‘upward trends are particularly prominent in young people’¹ is attracting attention, with no consideration that this may well be linked to the suffering imposed on households as the incidence of government-induced poverty has increased, which would impact on all members of any family affected by it, including young people and children in the poorest families. There needs to be much greater research to identify the causes of this increase in mental health problems in the younger generation, living in a society where those in greatest need are treated with contempt by successive administrations. With social policy reforms which starved to death service-users by the excessive use of sanctions, inflicted by underqualified civil servants, the government-induced public health crisis is not difficult to identify. Those in greatest need live in fear of the DWP and the next WCA, with the constant threat of sanctions never far from their minds. Increases in mental health problems were always inevitable.

Considering that the BMJ Editorial has just identified that ‘UK welfare reforms threaten health of the most vulnerable: cuts to disability benefits will worsen health and the economy’,¹⁶ it is I suggest better to extend research to a much wider database, where a lot more detailed published evidence is quickly identified exposing the government-induced public health crisis.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mo Stewart', written in a cursive style.

Mo Stewart

Fellow, Centre for Welfare Reform
Research Lead, Preventable Harm Project



Author [*'Cash Not Care: the planned demolition of the UK welfare state'*](#)
Editor [*The Preventable Harm Project*](#)
Researcher [*Influences and Consequences*](#)

Copied to: Professor Gerard McCartney, University of Glasgow
Dr Lucinda Hiam, University of Oxford
Dr Jed Boardman, Consultant Psychiatrist and Senior Lecturer in Social Psychiatry
Kamran Mallick, CEO Disability Rights UK

¹ [Data Decoded: Charting the Trends and Costs of Declining Mental Health in the UK](#)

¹⁶ [UK welfare reforms threaten health of the most vulnerable](#)