

## Young Women's Mental Health in Crisis

This briefing is based on findings from a survey carried out for Young Women's Trust by Populus Data Solutions from 25<sup>th</sup> June- 11<sup>th</sup> July 2019 with approximately 2000 young women aged 18 to 30 in England and Wales, alongside a comparison group of 2000 young men.

### We are facing an epidemic in young women's mental ill health

- Suicide among young women and girls is now at its highest level ever, having risen by 83 per cent in six years ([ONS](#)).
- Three quarters of mental health issues are established before the age of 24, and this is particularly prominent for young women, with high levels of depression, anxiety and self-harm ([Agenda, mental health key facts](#)).
- Our survey found that young women facing intersecting forms of discrimination, including young disabled and BAME women, as well as those on the lowest or no pay are the most adversely affected by mental ill health. Over a third (37%) of young women on the lowest or no pay reported having depression, the highest group in our survey.

### Sexism, relationships, work and finances all impact young women's mental health

- Young women's mental health cannot be seen in isolation from the context of sexism and broader structural inequality. 64% of young women we surveyed see sexism as a major problem in the UK. A recent [study](#) by UCL found that women who experience sexism in a range of settings including on the street and in the workplace were more likely to be younger and three times more likely to experience depression. Young Women's Trust are now working with Dr Ruth Hackett the author of this research to look further at how sexism affects young women's mental health.
- The other issues which young women we surveyed reported to have most affected their mental health were relationships (54%), work (53%) and financial worries (53%), followed by family conflict (50%). These percentages were all higher for young women than for young men. Although broad categories, this indicates a complexity of causal factors, which for young women often includes past [abuse or relational trauma](#).

*"If you're unable to work due to a mental health condition, you're deemed worthless. Yet if you manage to secure a job...you're treated like you're not really trying, even though you are actually working ten times harder than your colleagues in order to manage your condition and stay in work. This was my experience. It wears you down and feels like a vicious cycle you can't escape. It isn't any wonder that Young Women's Trust found so many young women are saying that work is making them ill."*  
Jenny, Young Women's Advisory Panel Member

## Over half of young women are worried about their mental health – a significant rise

- Our research shows increasing concern from young women about their mental health. Over half of young women (51%) reporting that they were worried about their mental health, compared to 44% in 2018, 45% in 2017 and 38% in 2016. This was higher for young women on the lowest or no pay (60%), and over three-quarters for young women with a disability or long-term health condition (77%).
- Young women reported a range of factors that made them feel anxious. Recent discourse in the area of young women's mental health has had much focus on the impact of social media on anxiety about appearance. Although this is a huge issue, we found that young women were more likely to be worried about their abilities (59%) or confidence (59%) than their appearance (48%).

## Young women fear for their future

- More than half of young women (51%) say they are worried for the future, this rises to 60 per cent among young BAME women, 61 per cent who the lowest, or no, income, and 76 per cent among those with a mental health condition.

*“Having battled with depression after the passing of my beautiful Mum, I know that each day can be a struggle...Having experienced this heart-breaking loss at a young age, I didn't know how to handle my despair and to talk about my state of mind during this time. Therefore, I strongly believe that we must talk about mental health to young women especially and provide support and guidance to them.”*  
Kerri, Young Women's Advisory Panel Member

## Mental ill health deeply impacts young women's lives-including their economic freedom

- More than one in five young women said that their mental health had affected their ability to stay in work (compared with 16% of young men) and the group most likely to say this was young women on the lowest or no pay (31%). They also reported an adverse impact on their ability to seek work, manage finances and perform well at school or work. 56% of young women report that mental health affected their ability to maintain friendships and relationships (compared to 47 per cent of young men).

## Contact Young Women's Trust

Young Women's Trust works to give economic power to young women by raising their voices, challenging sexist stereotypes and rebuilding workplaces free from discrimination. We do this by:

1. PROVIDING free coaching and CV feedback to young women to help them build their skills, identify their talents and develop strong mental health
2. ADVISING companies how to build equal workplaces
3. CAMPAIGNING for young women to be valued – at work and in their unpaid work
4. TRAINING YOUNG ACTIVISTS to share their experiences and be the change

If you'd like more information on our research, email [esther.sample@youngwomenstrust.org](mailto:esther.sample@youngwomenstrust.org) or visit [www.youngwomenstrust.org](http://www.youngwomenstrust.org).