



College of Psychiatrists Survey on Impact of Covid-19 on Mental Health

- **Survey of psychiatrists shows major rise in mental health referrals and relapses during Covid-19**
- **College of Psychiatrists President: ‘The pandemic has added enormous strain on an already fragile mental health service and there is little appreciation at a policy level for how serious the situation now is on the ground’**

The College of Psychiatrists of Ireland has warned that Covid-19 is having a significant, negative impact on mental health across the community.

The College has published findings of a survey of 180 psychiatrists (members of the College) examining the impact of Covid 19 on mental health in the seven-month period from **June 2020 to the end of December last**.

The survey, lead by Dr Eric Kelleher of the College Faculty of Liaison Psychiatry, focused on comparing the experience of psychiatrists during the second half of the year, after the ending of the first lockdown but before the introduction of the third lockdown in January of this year).

The survey shows that along with surging referral and relapse numbers, psychiatrists are also reporting increasingly unrealistic workloads.

Key survey findings:

Comparing the second half of 2020 with the first half of the year (to end May 2020):

- **Volume of referrals for secondary mental health services** - 36% of respondents reported a significant increase in referrals provided
- **Volume of Emergency interventions** - 30% of respondents reported a “significant increase” (29.86% of respondents)
- **Number of patients experiencing a relapse of mental health illness** – 28% of respondents reported a “significant increase” (28.38%).
- **Rate of New Referrals / Relapses reported for:**
 - **Self-harm / suicidal ideation:** 27% of respondents report “significant increase”
 - **Depression (new onset):** 24% report “significant increase”
 - **Generalised anxiety:** 39% report “significant increase”

The survey also found that amongst psychiatrists:

- 23% of respondents said that in their view the **“lethality” of methods of self-harm** had increased over the year
- 36% of respondents found that the **complexity of self-harm presentations** had increased
- 50% of respondents said they felt they were **unequipped with IT** to do their job remotely
- 65% said they themselves suffered **decreased wellbeing** as a result of Covid-19
- 79% expect their **workload to increase** in the coming months

Speaking today, **Dr William Flannery, President of the College of Psychiatrists of Ireland and a Consultant Psychiatrist**, said: “This survey covers the seven months up to the end of December 2020. It does not include the impact of the most recent lockdown which began in January so we can assume the figures it reveals have worsened in recent months. Even then, the figures we have for this survey starkly highlight the very serious impact which Covid-19 had on the mental health of the community through 2020. The pandemic has added enormous strain on an already fragile mental health service and there is little appreciation at a policy level for how serious the situation now is on the ground.”

He continued: “Psychiatrists are working hard to address the growing needs of the community, but unfortunately Covid-19 has exacerbated a problem that has been bubbling under the surface for some time. We need to see increased funding and resources before it is too late for thousands of people under serious and, in many cases, life-threatening strain.”

Dr Flannery said that psychiatrists themselves were under increasing pressure since the onset of Covid-19. “This is an unsustainable situation at present. The Government can no longer afford to merely pay lip service to an issue which is affecting every family in the country. The stakes are too high and the cost to people’s lives is too great.”

Note: A full summary of survey results is available [here](#).

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