

Experiences of poverty in later life


Mental health and wellbeing

Living on a low income can take a toll on people's emotional wellbeing, and older people living in poverty have a higher risk of developing mental health problems.

Approximately 1 in 10 older people in England have moderate or severe anxiety or depression.¹ Research carried out by Independent Age in 2020 found that older people on the lowest incomes have a higher risk of developing mental health issues. Being on a low income can increase your risk of developing mental health issues due to stress, scarcity of resources and negative perceptions of people in poverty.²

In our research exploring experiences of poverty in later life, many of the people we spoke to told us about the toll their financial situation was having on their emotional wellbeing. For some people, their low income was causing them to experience depression or low mood, with people using words like "despair" and "depressing". For others, financial hardship was causing them to experience worry or anxiety, with people using words like "anxious" and "struggle". Other older people we spoke to told us their financial situation was causing them to live in a constant state of vigilance about money – checking their bank balance frequently, monitoring their outgoings constantly and always feeling on edge.

In all these stories there was one clear theme – living on a low income was having a detrimental effect on the mental health of older people living in poverty.



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People living in households in the lowest 20% income bracket in Great Britain are **two to three times more likely to develop mental health problems** than those in the highest.³

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On a knife edge, shall we say. I can just about survive, but I'm worried.

Adrian, 66

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I mean, I'm on anti-depressants. Like I say, some days are really bad, I'm really down and other days I can be okay. It depends what's going on financially.

Yvonne, 76

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Sometimes you think, 'Christ, is this what life's all about?'
Georgina, 66

Christine's story

Christine lives alone in Yorkshire. She lives off Pension Credit, and a small private pension her husband left her when he died. Her low income is a constant source of worry for her, and she has to be constantly vigilant about money.

She keeps a written record of all her outgoings and monitors all her spending to make sure she sticks to a strict budget. Her low income means she is frequently anxious about money and has to constantly check her spending.

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Constant headache, always. Constantly having to keep a check on everything I spend. Not just now and again, constantly. And I do and I am careful, and I do make my money go round, but it's not easy.

Christine, 60–70

Policy recommendations



The Department for Work and Pensions must develop a meaningful strategy to address poverty in the UK, which considers the impact poverty in later life has on mental health and wellbeing.



The role of an Older People's Commissioner should be established in both England and Scotland, to hold the government to account and make sure that provisions are made to reduce poverty in later life.

This poster is part of the **Experiences of poverty in later life** series. It draws on research Independent Age conducted into the experiences of people aged 65+ living on a low income. You can find out more at independentage.org/experiences-poverty-in-later-life.

¹In focus: *Experiences of older age in England*, Independent Age, 16 April 2020, see independentage.org/focus-experiences-of-older-age-england.

²*Psychological perspectives on poverty*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, June 2015, see jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/files-research/psychological-perspectives-poverty-summary.pdf.

³*Mental health statistics: poverty*, Mental Health Foundation, 2016, see mentalhealth.org.uk/statistics/mental-health-statistics-poverty.