

Your Mind Matters

Stigma, understanding and inequalities

Tom Gentry, Age UK

Age UK

- UK's leading charity working with and for older people
- Network of local charities providing local services and advocacy
- Information and advice
- National advocacy and campaigning



Mental health in later life



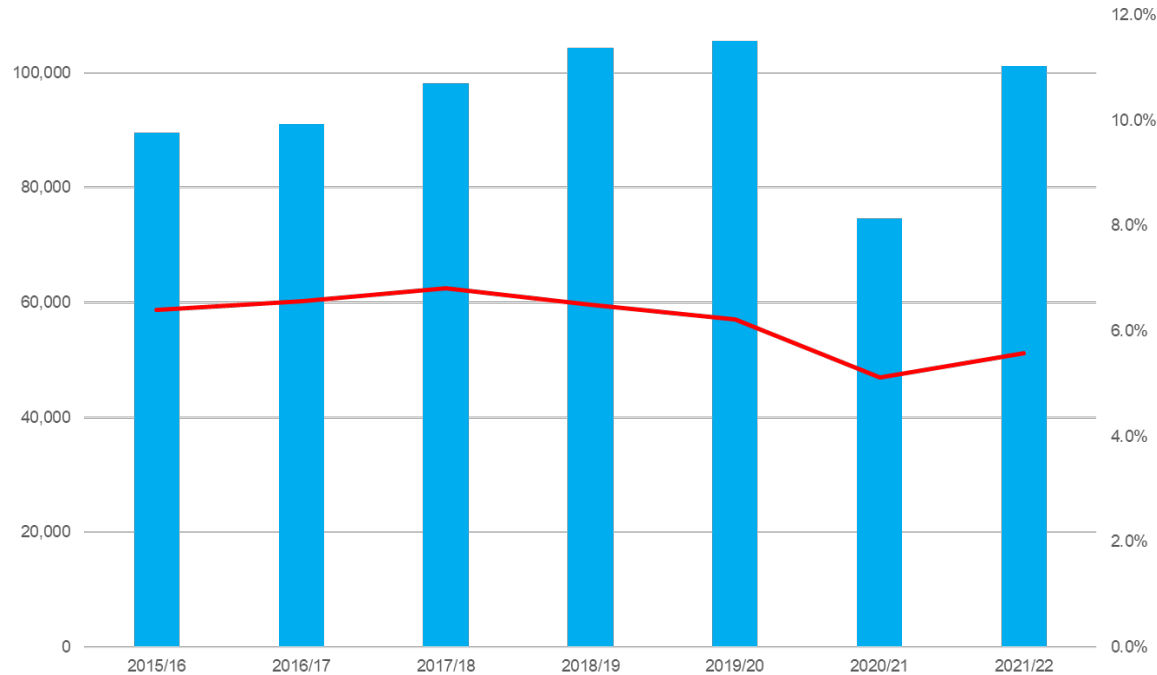
- Depression is estimated to affect 22% of men and 28% of women aged 65 or over
- 40-60% of older people in care homes
- Anxiety disorders affect 1 in 20 older people
- Prevalence of subthreshold depressive symptoms: 31%
- Historically – over-prescribing of tranquilisers; more recently, anti-depressants; under-use of talking therapies.

Bias and discrimination

- 47% believed older people find it more difficult to learn new skills
- 64% believed forgetfulness a natural part of growing older
- 25% of 18- to 34-year-olds said 'it is normal to be unhappy and depressed when you are old'
- Majority believed 65+ **less likely** to recover from a mental health condition than people aged 18–64. Nearly half of older people themselves believed this.
- Study: doctors much more likely to diagnose depression and anxiety in younger people with identical needs



Inequalities in practice

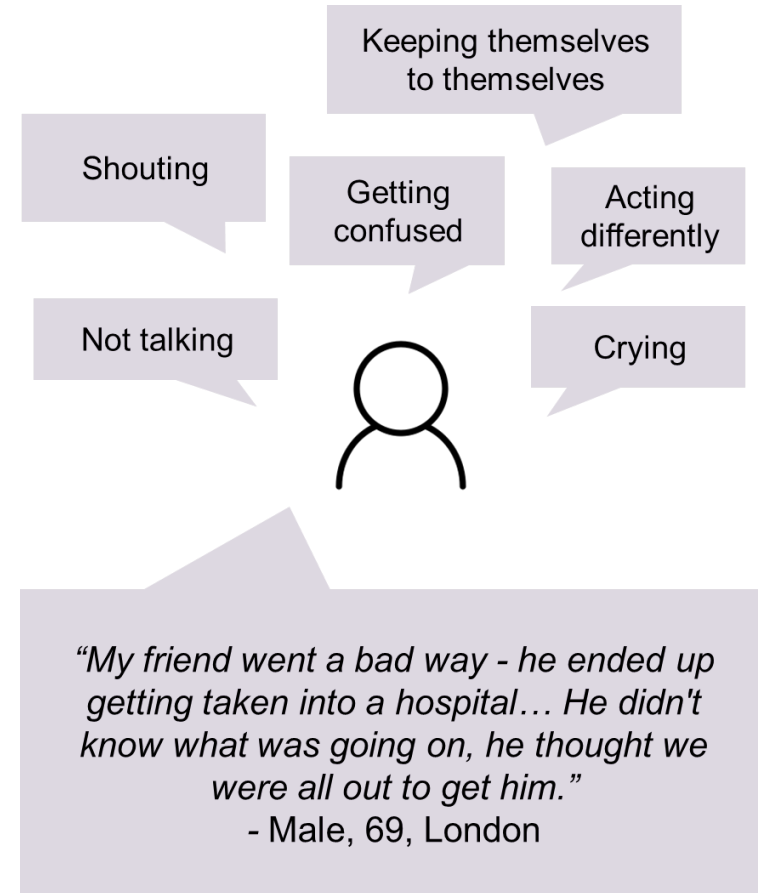


- Talking therapies promoted by the NHS
- 1.9 million adults receive these services annually
- The expected rate for over-65s using services: **12%** (Department of Health, 2011)
- Older people: around **6%** of those referred
- Approx 115,000 more referrals to reflect need
- Worst performing protected characteristic

**What does “mental health”
mean to older people?**

Narrow frame of reference

- Older people often discuss only more severe issues, for example psychosis and schizophrenia
- For some, the phrase holds immediate, negative connotations – for example, with ‘being crazy’
- Older people also often struggle to identify potential symptoms of mental health issues
- The most commonly cited are outward signs of sadness / anger, or withdrawing from those around them



Stigma and fear

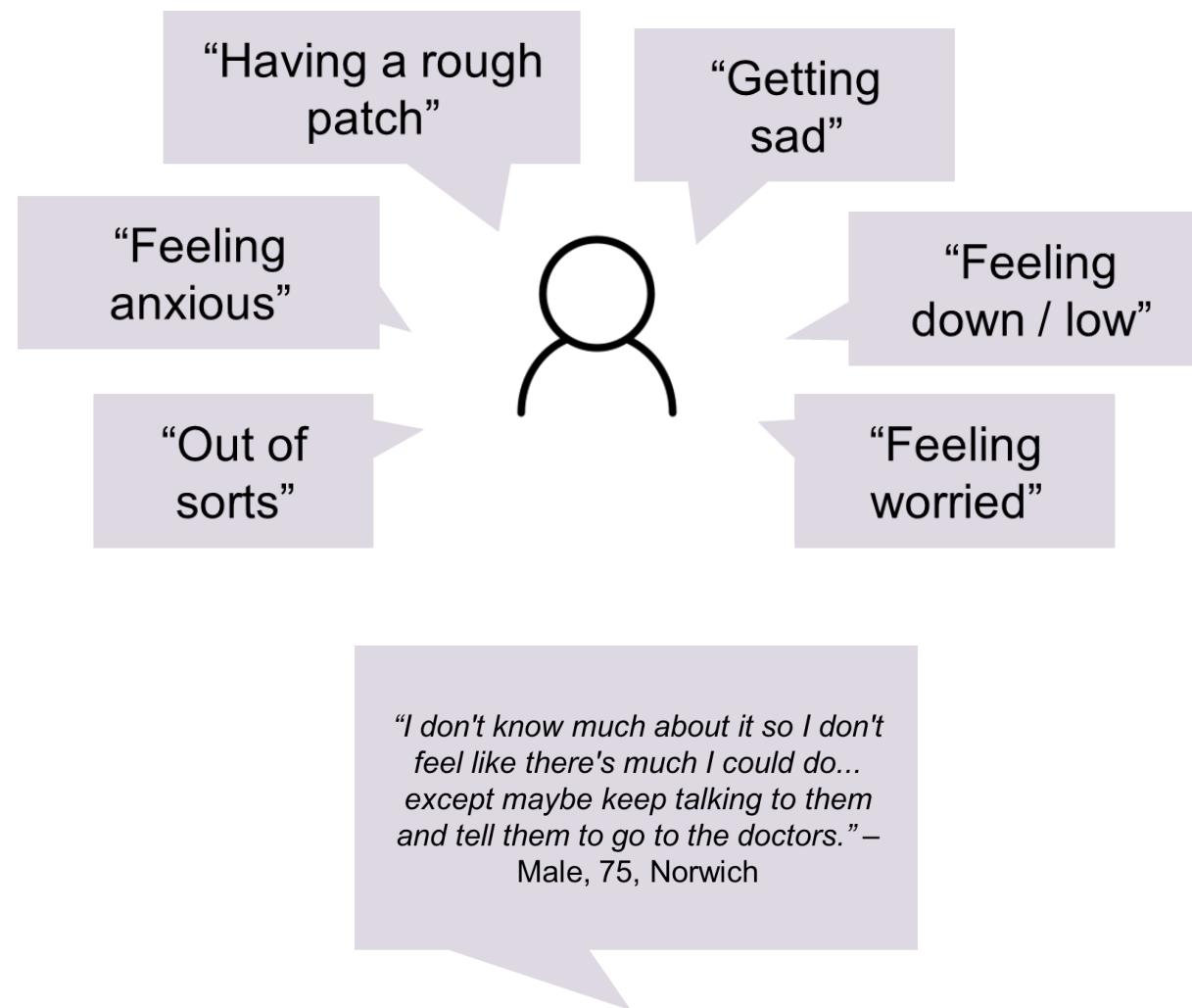
“Older people don’t want to be seen as weak and don’t want to accept they have a mental health illness.”

“Older people might be worried about not being taken seriously or taken too seriously – they have a fear of being incarcerated or going into a home. My mother had a ‘terrible fear’ of being put in a home and never getting out – there’s also a fear of the unknown.”

- Fear of being labelled, possibly compromising independence
- Frequently viewed as a private matter - something to be discussed only with close family or friends, if at all
- Not all older people feel this stigma to the same extent – possible generational affect
- Healthcare professionals often believe that most older people feel strong stigma
- Shapes how they approach older people’s mental health – make an assumption that most do not want to talk about it

Getting help

- Poor understanding of what's possible
- Recognise importance of staying active and social
- There is trust in their healthcare team – will take their advice, engage with treatment
- Reflected in better recovery rates for talking therapies
- Reluctance to take more medications, BUT often GPs' first instinct



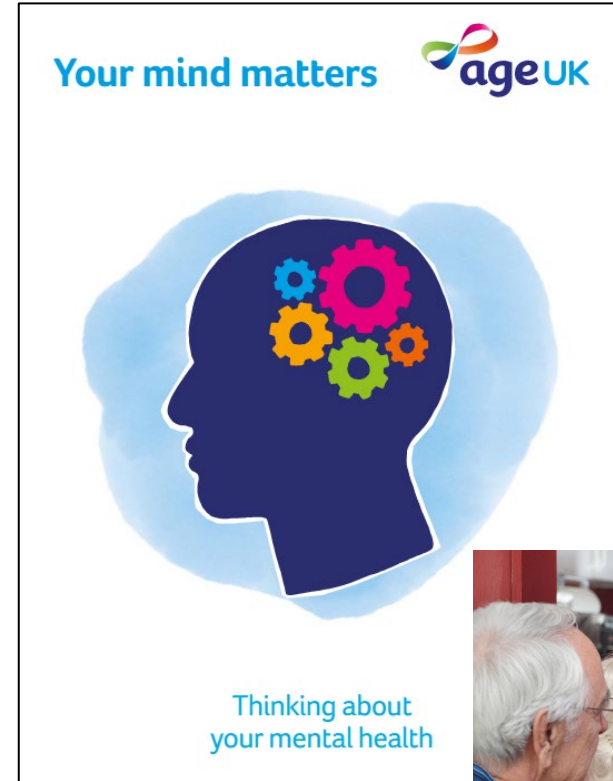
State of care for older people



- [Briefing published in March 2024](#)
- How well are older people's needs reflected in national policy and services?
- “Ageist attitudes and assumptions about mental health in later life underpin a system that discriminates against older people”
- “Fatalistic assumptions” undermine effective support
- No national plan or blueprint for mental health support in later life
- Need investment in effective interventions, and a health and care workforce with the skills, knowledge and understanding to meet their diverse needs

Our offer

- Information and advice
 - Materials produced with older people
 - Tailored to our audience
 - Coordinated promotion to raise awareness
- Helpline and *SilverLine*
- Local network
 - In some areas, counselling
 - Social spaces and activities
 - Some commissioned by NHS and local councils



Thank you