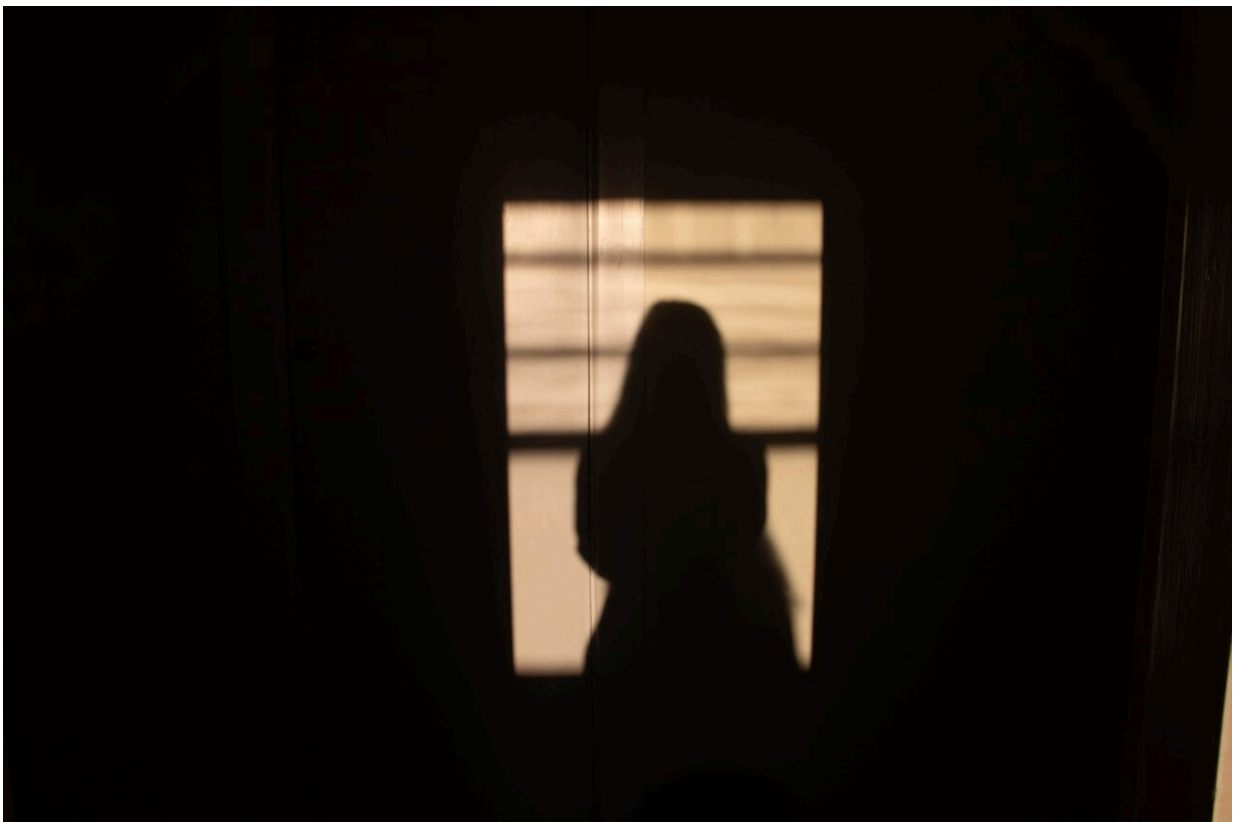


Report: Female charity workers suffered high levels of stress during the pandemic and cost of living crisis

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Female charity workers, who supported vulnerable women throughout and beyond the pandemic, experienced high levels of psychological

distress, a new study has found.

Researchers conducted 135 interviews with [women](#) across the U.K. who worked for community-based third sector organizations delivering services, support and advocacy to women and girls who were experiencing poverty, [domestic abuse](#), homelessness or were socially isolated and disadvantaged in other ways.

The findings showed women working in these kinds of services experienced trauma, exhaustion, depression, and anxiety related to the nature of the work, which were further exacerbated by high workloads and concerns about job security and funding.

The [research report](#), titled "Women Working to Support Women in the Welfare Sphere: Psychosocial Challenges," was completed by researchers from the Scottish Center for Crime and Justice Research at the University of Glasgow and the University of Cambridge.

Co-author of the research, Professor Michele Burman, University of Glasgow, said, "Women workers told us about how the pandemic and lockdowns led to an increased need for their services by women who were presenting with ever more complex needs.

"To respond to these increasing and multi-layered needs within the context of the pandemic, organizations had to significantly change the way they provided support by moving away from in-person contact by setting up telephone helplines, holding meetings online or even installing chatbots on their website. However, this also left professionals feeling isolated and unsupported because they couldn't see their colleagues on a day-to-day basis, and anxious because of the lack of face-to-face contact with those they supported.

"All of this change at a time when many other existing networks and

support fell away created a considerable emotional toll on those workers who were left to fill in the gaps."

A mental health care worker described the emotional and physical toll her work carried: "I mean I think that sometimes it stays with me, you know, words that people use or phrases or, you know... I mean sometimes you'll have people who just cry for, you know, 20 minutes and there's something about having the endurance just to be with that and not try and fix it because you can't.

"All you can do is be one human being with another. I do think that the human aspect of it is why I am who I am and I think that that does, at times, mean that I can be very, very, I'll just say it, knackered emotionally."

Professor Burman said, "As the immediate risks of the pandemic receded, we saw the deepening cost of living crisis which once again disproportionately affected women, particularly those experiencing marginalization and social isolation.

She added, "The crises also emphasized the need for longer term, more predictable funding sources which in itself brings a lot of stress on staff and organizations."

One manager told the research team, "It's stress-inducing, it's the money, it's the sustainability, it's that constantly having to, you know, keep going without core funding, it's the short-term nature of funding and, yeah, yeah, that's the biggest stress."

The two-year study also sought to identify positive practices which support worker welfare and service delivery.

Co-author Dr. Annie Crowley, also of the University of Glasgow, said

the report pointed out the best ways for organizations to address these adverse working conditions.

Crowley commented, "Dealing with the effects of a demanding workload along with the emotional toll this kind of work brings can't be managed by someone on their own. Rather than rely on individual self-awareness or [self-care](#) the most effective way is to have a team approach that has strong policies and mechanisms for identifying, recognising and responding to the risks of psychological distress.

"Organizations should encourage acknowledgment of the potential of psychological distress as a result of this work and have open conversations about its likelihood so that it becomes normalized. We need to see leaders do more by introducing policies and procedures that reduce stress, provide supervision with regular debriefs and strategies that can help staff build resilience."

The report provides nine recommendations in total including giving staff more training and raising awareness of burnout, compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma in the workplace. It also highlights the need for funders to consider introducing more stream-lined application processes and better alignment of their "asks" of those applying for funds to help reduce the additional stress of the precarious funding environment of those in the third-sector.

More information: Women Working to Support Women in the Welfare Sphere: Psychosocial Challenges. womensupportingwomen.uk/

Provided by University of Glasgow

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