

Remembering Social Inequalities

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REMEMBERING SOCIAL INEQUALITIES

... what I'm going to do

- Talk broadly about the major challenge facing mental health services
- Remind us of the huge costs of “forgetting” about inequality
- Conclude with a few suggestion

REMEMBERING SOCIAL INEQUALITIES

... the challenge

Thinking and practice in
mental health

- Knowledge about the
ways inequalities:
- harm mental health
 - impair services

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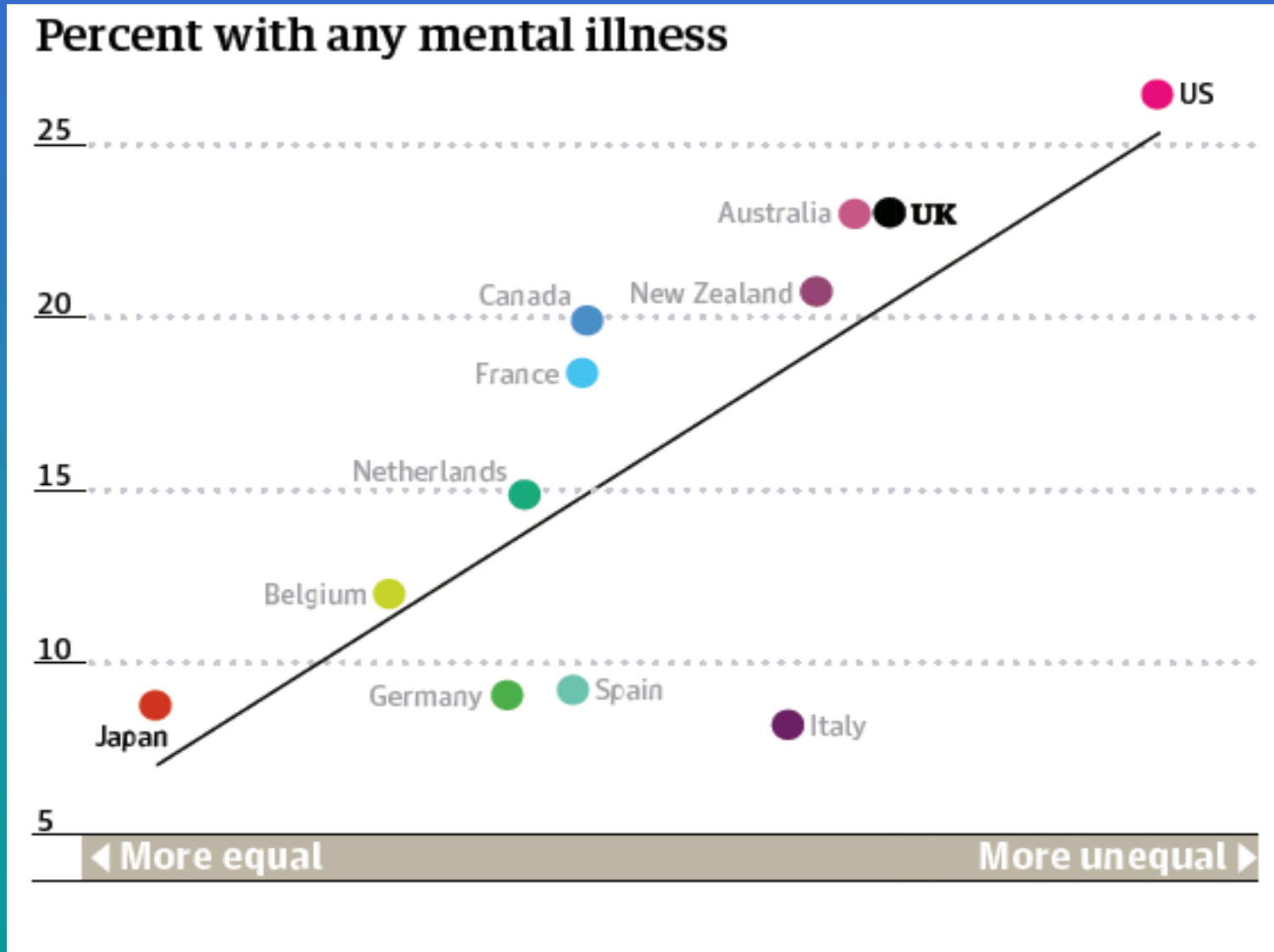
Recognition that a
commitment to
equality & the just
use of power is
central to healing and
recovery



What is known about social inequalities and mental health?



SOCIAL INEQUALITIES ... affluence isn't enough



SOCIAL INEQUALITIES

... to start with they are systemic

- We are all born into and are part of dynamic systems of inequality
- It is not simply a case of e.g. men oppressing women - simplistic dichotomies and assumptions don't work
- Inequalities pose the greatest risk to people who are disadvantaged especially multiply disadvantaged
- But they also pose a risk to the mental health of the privileged



SOCIAL INEQUALITIES

... the costs of privilege

- There are psychological costs if you have been raised to exercise and protect power on behalf of your group e.g.
 - go to war
 - exploit others e.g. as labour or sexually
- Justification requires hardening your heart against 'others' and indirectly yourself and people like you
- Most evident in the socialisation of men

SOCIAL INEQUALITIES

... implications for mental health

e.g. Socialisation
Violence
Normalisation

e.g. Poverty
Work
Abuse
Isolation



e.g. Responses
Communication
Help seeking
Resources

SOCIAL INEQUALITIES & MENTAL HEALTH

... where is the knowledge?



What happens when we “forget”
about inequality?

“FORGETTING” SOCIAL INEQUALITY

... some implications for patients/clients

- Denied opportunities to make useful links between their mental health and their lives and experiences
- Likely to be seen as the problem i.e. mad or bad or an addict
- Likely to be further disempowered:
 - given a diagnosis
 - medicated, sectioned, secluded, observed
 - stigmatised and blamed for not changing or complying

“FORGETTING” SOCIAL INEQUALITY

... some implications for staff

- Coercion makes more sense than empowerment
- Often feel in conflict with patients/client, ‘got at’, and lacking in hope
- Tolerate abuses of power within services and practices that can re-traumatise
- Don’t want to work with women – men are easier

“FORGETTING” GENDER INEQUALITY ... in short

- Mental health services that ‘forget’ about inequalities are ineffective and hazardous
- They also consume huge amounts of money:
 - in 2008/09 Mental Health Services in England cost £5.892 billion
 - 70-75% of this were staffing costs

Department of Health (2009) National Survey of Investment in Mental Health Services.

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_088701

Why is it easy to “forget”
about inequality?



RESISTANCE ... happens

- Attempts to bring knowledge about what is known about inequality into mainstream mental health services usually meet opposition
- There are clashes with the medical model, and other popular approaches
- Staff may be persuaded that integrating what they know about inequality into their practice:
 - isn't legitimate
 - isn't a priority
 - isn't possible or can only happen as an undercover activity

RESISTANCE

... it isn't legitimate

I would suggest that you use the word 'cope' instead of 'survive'. Words like survival, oppression and exploitation are critically important issues, but emphasise my earlier point that it is language that is not commonly used. You might argue that it should be but the reality is they are not and we need to use language that people can relate to. Equally language such as 'gender socialisation, gendered interaction, associated power dynamics', will not be well received.

Feedback on a draft report for the DH

RESISTANCE ... why?

- Inequality and abuses of power thrive on silence
- Historically mainstream mental health services have helped to keep this silence
- Attempts to mainstream anything to do with inequality represent a serious challenge to the status quo
- Resistance to speaking openly about gender inequality seems especially strong

Is change possible?



CHANGE

... **what we know**

- Change is rooted in and sustained by social movements
- To date they have mainly been energised by single issues
- In the UK – at least – this is a good time to work together and make the most of opportunities created by equalities policies and legislation



CONCLUSION

... finding ways forward

When using a recovery perspective it is important:

- To both remember and discover what it is that we, or the people we work with, are recovering from
- To build understanding of how people survive the effects of inequalities on:
 - who they are
 - their lives & what they have had to endure
- Then we maximise the chances of being useful