

# Digital Exclusion Profiling of Vulnerable Groups Adults with Mental Health Problems: A Profile



## Executive Summary

Studies by the Office of National Statistics show that in the UK, one in every six adults is suffering from a Mental Health Problem of some level of severity. Despite being one of the most significant phenomena to affect the working population, it remains one of the least understood and accepted within wider society. The universality of the problem is shown by the fact that there is no discrimination of age, gender, ethnicity or occupation for those affected. The common thread is the complexity of individual need that results in statutory agencies being unable to provide adequate assistance.

For an individual who is suffering from a Mental Health Problem, remaining connected within society is a key to managing the environmental and emotional factors contributing to the

issue. Faced with misconceptions of Mental Health prevalent within society and subsequent degrees of exclusion, this Vulnerable Group is at high risk of developing other problems (e.g. debt, drug abuse, homelessness).

As more members of families become carers for these individuals and start tackling these issues in the home, this shift in practice needs to be recognised with more relevant support being provided. With this Vulnerable Group facing an increasing likelihood of social exclusion, ICT could play a larger role in overcoming the significant barriers that it faces.

## The Profiling Report

### Aim

The Report, first published in October 2008, highlights the life circumstances of Adults with Mental Health problems and provides insight as to how technology is used currently by and in support of this Vulnerable Group. Within this context, the Report also aims to provide ideas and considerations for aspects of development of ICT to tackle the social exclusion problems faced.

### Methodology

The research methodology for this Report made use of secondary research to provide an understanding of the issues faced by the Group and overlay this with primary research conducted in focus groups consisting of Adults with Mental Health Problems and those who support them.

It is acknowledged that there are varying degrees of Mental Health Problems and consequently defining exact subject groups has its shortcomings. For the purpose of this Report the segment for investigation has been

narrowed to adults (those of working age) and those accessing secondary health services. The ICT usage of this group is the primary focus and it is intended that assumptions and considerations appropriate for the wider group can be extrapolated from this.

## Highlights of Findings

### Barriers

- Stigma around Mental Health Problems results in social exclusion and causes employment difficulty coupled with increased levels of debt
- The sheer scale and size of the Group, along with the complex individual needs provides huge difficulties for providing assistance
- A lack of support and training for family members taking on a caring role can lead to them in turn suffering mental health problems

### ICT

- Mobile phones are shown to be the most important ICT device providing both the direct contact that is required by the Group and privacy if situations require
- The Research suggests that the internet could be an important tool and there could be a wider take up through more free and universal access, as well as ensuring that services available were simple enough to use
- While ICT may provide some assistance for this Group, personal contact still remains the key aspect of support for many members

## Digital Exclusion Profiling of Vulnerable Groups. Adults with Mental Health Problems: A profile.

The full Report provides detailed findings from the working groups on the usage and current barriers for technology. It also details the wide range of support that is available, access to which is the underlying consideration of this study. The Report uses a number of Case Studies to highlight projects that are delivering success in this field. The Report concludes with some topics for further consideration.

The full document is available on [www.esd-toolkit.org.uk](http://www.esd-toolkit.org.uk)



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