

Why do we have a mental health crisis?

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The growth in mental ill-health is staggering. But might it be that those who are suffering are being entirely rational? In a world that is set up to fail them, aren't they right to be stressed, anxious, depressed and afraid?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0CwOFRheWb0?si=_v1y-0aI5AdnJP1R

This is the audio version:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=cibma-1785a9d-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&fonts=Arial&skin=f6f6f6&font-color=&logo_link=episode_page&btn-skin=c73a3a

And this is the transcript:

Why do we have a mental health crisis in this country and, let's be honest, around the world?

The FT ran a series on mental health in the week before Christmas and asked people why they thought there was such a crisis and the answer came back, "There's too much social media."

Talk about missing the point. That was spectacularly wrong.

And we do have a mental health crisis. The number of young people needing help for

mental ill health has risen dramatically, maybe by 50 per cent, since the time of the Covid crisis.

The number of older people now likely to be suffering some form of mental ill health at any time is up to 1 in 4 of the population.

This is serious stuff.

Ten per cent or so of young people who should be in work, or education, or training aren't at all because they can't face any of those things. This is people dropping out of society because of mental ill health.

So what is going on here? I want to talk about something that I discussed with someone quite recently. We were talking about quite young children who have anxiety, and anxiety is a major problem amongst children, even in primary schools now.

And what would Wes Streeting's answer to that be, we wondered? If he had a perfect world, what would Wes Streeting provide? He would put a counsellor in the primary school.

What would the counsellor do? They would sit with the child for an hour, and at the end of the hour the counsellor would say, "This child has an anxiety disorder." So now they have a diagnosis. Except it isn't a diagnosis at all, of course, is it? It's a description. Nothing has changed because the counsellor has told the child they have anxiety. All they've given is a label to what the child already knew. They were frightened.

And at this point we have a choice to make, and I think this is really important. We either say the child shouldn't be frightened of the world because the world is benevolent, or we look at the world and say the child should be frightened of the world because it is malevolent. And I really do think that the choice might now be as binary as that.

And I'm going to go for the choice which neoliberal economics would tell me I should make, and that is, I should assume that the child is rational. Because remember, neoliberal economics assumes that everyone is rational.

And if the child who is frightened of the world is rational, and their fear is well placed, then it must imply that the world that they can see in which they live, their parents and carers, and the people that they know live, is malevolent. It is out to harm them.

And they're right. Let's be clear. The evidence stacks up with this.

Twenty-five per cent of children in the UK live in poverty.

Far too many of them live in absolute poverty.

The children see their parents going without meals so that the child may be fed.

They know that they're living in temporary accommodation and whatever school they're at at the moment and whatever friends they've got right now may not be the friends that they will have soon because they'll have been moved on yet again.

They know that their parents can't get work.

They know that their parents are struggling to pay the bills.

And it's obvious that the stress of providing that child with a Christmas present is enormous. and will rebound sometime in the new year when the debt arrives that was used to pay for it.

The child is not crazy when it thinks that there's something wrong. The child is entirely right to think that there is something wrong. What is wrong, is the world in which we live. The world which denies that this is a possible outcome from neoliberal economics that says if only we can perfect the allocation of resources by overcoming the imperfections that the person has or their lack of training or skills or whatever else it might be - including the fact that they're an introvert, or that they've got ADHD or autism or whatever is the reason for the prejudice against them that society has stacked in their favour, including the fact that they too were born of parents in poverty - whatever neoliberalism says about that is wrong. Because neoliberalism cannot provide a perfect allocation of resources. Neoliberalism is designed by and supported by people who perpetuate a myth that the wealthy are virtuous and theirs shall be the reward. Everybody else can go by the wayside.

The child, with anxiety, has worked that out. Okay, not in the way I've just presented it perhaps, but in the way in which it impacts on them.

So, what is the point? Do we try to persuade this child, either through therapy or through giving them drugs, that they, the square peg, have to fit into the round hole that neoliberalism has ordained for them, which is probably a pretty rubbish job?

Or instead, why shouldn't that child be allowed to be who they are?

Why shouldn't their parent be supported to provide for that child in the way that they know they could if only the opportunity was available?

Why can't the resources that the wealthy command - but do not use - be made available to those who need them because they literally are in need?

This is the real cause of the crisis in mental health. Mental health - ill health that is, because mental health is a great thing by the way, we all want that - it's mental ill health that is the problem - mental ill health is not something that is appearing because of social media.

It's not something that's appearing because we now live in a more lonely society.

The reason for our mental ill health crisis is that people are quite reasonably living in fear. And that fear is of a future where they know they aren't wanted. And that fear is created by the neoliberal myth that says only the wealthy count.

Listen to the child who's got anxiety syndrome. They know what is going on.

Deal with their problem by removing their causes for fear. Then we might have a better world.