

## Research report

### Can depression be prevented?

#### **1. Why did we ask?**

Towards a Mentally Flourishing Scotland (2009) is an action plan authored by the Scottish Government which outlines plans to improve mental health and wellbeing until 2011<sup>1</sup>. In 2008-2009 in Scotland 7% of GP-registered patients were diagnosed with an initial episode of depression<sup>2</sup>. We were interested in whether you think that the incidence of depression can be reduced, and if the Government can and should implement prevention programmes. We were also interested in what you do to keep yourself mentally well.

#### **2. Who did we ask?**

643 people responded to the survey; of 587 who disclosed their gender and age 71% were female and 29% male. 9% were under the age of 25, 19% aged between 26 and 35, 42% between 36 and 50 and 30% aged above 51. 33% of 585 people described themselves as currently experiencing depression. 90% of respondents completed the survey.

#### **3. What did people think?**

*Can depression be prevented?*

100% of respondents answered this question.

- ♦ 89% believed that prevention of depression was possible in some cases
- ♦ 8% believed it is never preventable
- ♦ 3% believed all cases could be prevented

*Who should be taking action to prevent depression?*

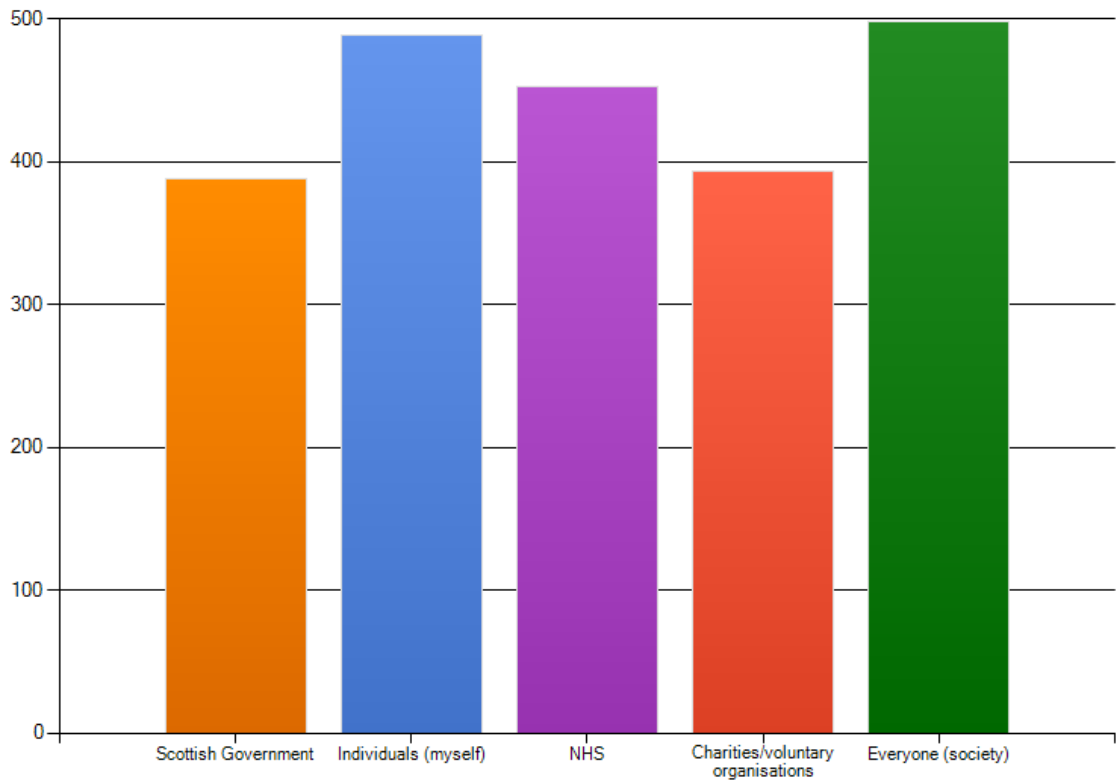
631 people answered this question. We asked you to indicate all the groups that you believe play a role in depression prevention and it appears from Figure 1 that depression is everyone's business.

---

<sup>1</sup> Scottish Government. (2009). Towards a mentally flourishing Scotland: Policy and actions plan 2009-2011. Edinburgh: The Scottish Government.

<sup>2</sup> ISD Scotland (2009). *General practice – quality and outcomes framework*. Retrieved from <http://www.isdscotland.org/isd/4897.html>

**Who should be taking action to prevent people developing Depression?**



**Figure 1: groups respondents believe have responsibility for depression prevention.**

#### **4. Support for prevention measures**

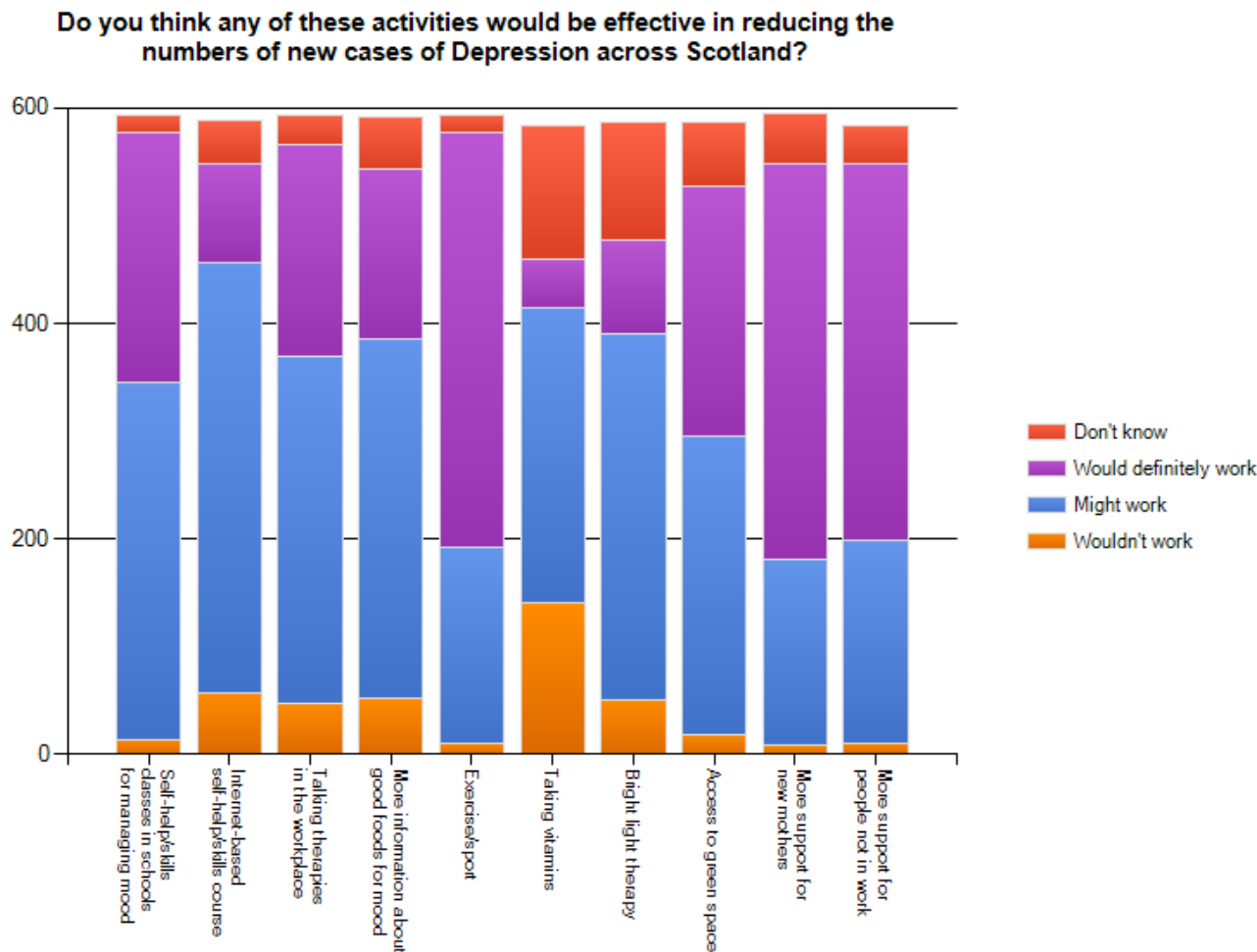
93% of respondents (of 607 who answered the question) said they would take part in an activity aimed at preventing depression. Of the 7% who would not the most cited reasons for not doing so included that they felt they did not need to utilise such activities, they would not help and are too busy with other commitments.

There are a number of different activities that could be implemented into a depression prevention programme, and respondents were asked to indicate one which they would be most willing to take part in. Table 1 gives the activities suggested in the survey and the percentage of individuals who endorsed the particular activities (552 people responded).

**Table 1: the type of activity respondents would prefer to take part in as part of a depression prevention programme**

Activity	% of respondents who selected this activity
Relaxation	23
Exercise	21
Learning coping skills	20
Social	19
Psychological support	17

A wider range of possible interventions were given and respondents asked to indicate which ones they believe would work in preventing new cases of depression. Exercise, support for new mothers and support for people not in work were thought to definitely work by the majority of respondents (65% of respondents for exercise, 62% for increased support for new mothers and 60% for extra support to those not in work).



**Figure 2: the numbers of respondents who believed the listed interventions would definitely work, might work and wouldn't work**

There was also an option for respondents to put forward their own ideas for preventing depression. Among the most popular answers (five or more endorsements) were campaigns to combat stigma, improved access to talking therapies, increased peer support, improved access to local support groups, increased awareness of the symptoms, increased volunteering opportunities and improved support in schools for young people.

## 5. How you manage your mood

77% of respondents believed *they* should take action to prevent their own depression and so we asked you to tell us three ways that you manage your

mood. 548 people put forward suggestions and here is a selection of the most common answers:

- ◆ Getting plenty of sleep
- ◆ Eating well; avoiding alcohol
- ◆ Exercise and sports
- ◆ Reading/writing
- ◆ Socialising/spending time with others
- ◆ Music
- ◆ Keeping busy
- ◆ Taking time out for yourself
- ◆ Laughing
- ◆ Volunteering
- ◆ Looking after pets
- ◆ Meditation/relaxation
- ◆ Seeking professional help

## **6. Where do you find information on managing your mood?**

We asked you to tell us all the places you look for information on staying mentally well. The most popular place to look for was websites (75%), followed by GP or health worker (71%). 12% of respondents reported having difficulty finding information. 28% found it very easy and 60% found it okay to find.

## **7. Summary and conclusions**

The vast majority of respondents believed that in some cases depression can be prevented. If this is the case then it seems more could be done to prevent depression in the first place. Most respondents believe the prevention of depression is the responsibility of a range of groups, from the individual to society at large and the Government, NHS and charitable organisations. We asked if respondents would be willing to take part in a depression prevention activity and an overwhelming 93% said they would. This finding is encouraging and suggests that giving people access to depression prevention activities would be well received. There was roughly equal preference for five types of activities suggested, with activities involving relaxation (e.g. yoga, meditation) most popular. It seems that a programme which encompasses one or more elements would be most suitable.

All of the interventions suggested were supported by most respondents. Exercise and more support for new mothers and people not in work were thought to definitely work by most people.

Overall most people think some cases of depression are preventable. Furthermore there is support for prevention activities and interventions, and the vast majority (93%) of respondents would be willing to take part in such activities. Therefore these findings suggest more funding and research for population-wide programmes for depression prevention would be beneficial.