

September 2025

In Your Own Words

Health Impact paper

Experiences from *In Your Own Words*,
the Post Office Horizon IT Inquiry's listening project.



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Content Warning

This paper contains potentially distressing or sensitive content. If you are affected by any of the content in this paper, details of wellbeing resources are available in Annex B.



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Foreword

Since the launch of the Inquiry's listening project *In Your Own Words*, we have been deeply moved by the accounts of those who have come forward to share their experiences. Following the publication of our first *In Your Own Words* paper, which focused on relationships and family, we have continued to listen to the experiences shared with us. This is our second paper, focusing on health and wellbeing.

From the outset, the Chair of the Inquiry, Sir Wyn Williams, has emphasised the importance of recognising the human impact of the scandal. This focus is evident in the themes covered in Volume 1 of the Final Report, which was published on 8th July 2025. As the Inquiry progresses, we remain committed to listening to the voices of those who have been affected by the Horizon scandal.

We are immensely grateful to everyone who has contributed to *In Your Own Words*.

In April 2025, we held an engagement event, which focused on health. Those who attended the event spoke candidly about the toll the Horizon scandal has taken on their physical and mental wellbeing. We noted that some affected persons who had not previously engaged with the Inquiry felt able to attend and participate in this event.

We appreciate the contributions from everyone who attended the event and hope, even if only in a small way, that the experience was meaningful and helpful for them. Many of those present described long-term health issues, stress-related conditions, and the emotional strain that has shaped their lives in lasting ways.

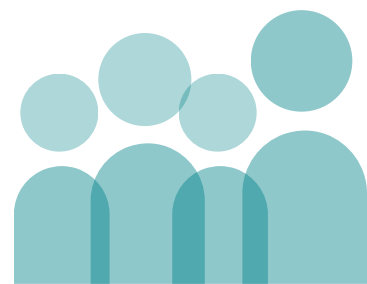
This second paper focuses on the health impacts that people described. It brings together personal reflections about the deep and often invisible consequences of the Horizon scandal – the human impact behind the headlines.

Looking ahead, our next paper will explore the broader impacts of the Horizon scandal on communities - how trust, cohesion, and local life have been affected. As always, we welcome continued participation from anyone who wishes to share their experience.

Thank you for reading these important stories.

Leila Pilgrim

Secretary to the Post Office Horizon IT Inquiry



What is *In Your Own Words*?

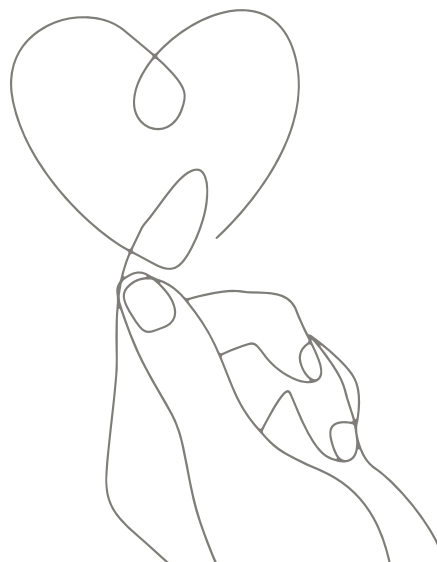
In Your Own Words is the Post Office Horizon IT Inquiry's listening project, intended to gather the experiences of those who were impacted by the Horizon scandal.

[In Volume 1 of his final report](#), Sir Wyn referred generally and in case studies to the type and scale of the human impact of the Horizon scandal. The accounts shared with us through *In Your Own Words* provide a less formal but no less important or compelling part of the human impact narrative. By gathering the stories of the wider community of affected individuals, *In Your Own Words* seeks to complement the formal hearings and content in Volume 1 of Sir Wyn William's final report.

A listening project helps us to record a broad range of experiences, some of which touch on issues that may not have arisen in the formal evidence received during the hearings. When people share information with *In Your Own Words* they do so anonymously and this has enabled some contributors to share personal (and sometimes collective) insights on certain events.

We recognise that other people may have been impacted by the Horizon scandal beyond those we have already heard from. So, we share the accounts that we receive mindful that other stories exist and are unknown.

We indicated earlier this year¹ that we would issue a short series of up to 4 papers that focus on particular themes. The intention of these *In Your Own Words* papers is to create a record of the broader way the Horizon scandal has impacted individuals, and to share stories of this impact with the public.



Who can take part?

Through *In Your Own Words*, we would also like to hear from people who have been affected by the Post Office Horizon scandal and would like to share their experiences.

In Your Own Words is open to:

- current or former sub-postmasters
- branch workers and assistants
- family members
- friends
- community members
- other members of the public who may have reflections to share

We would like to hear from current or previous employees of organisations linked to the scandal, such as the Post Office, Government or Fujitsu, who may have been impacted in different ways.

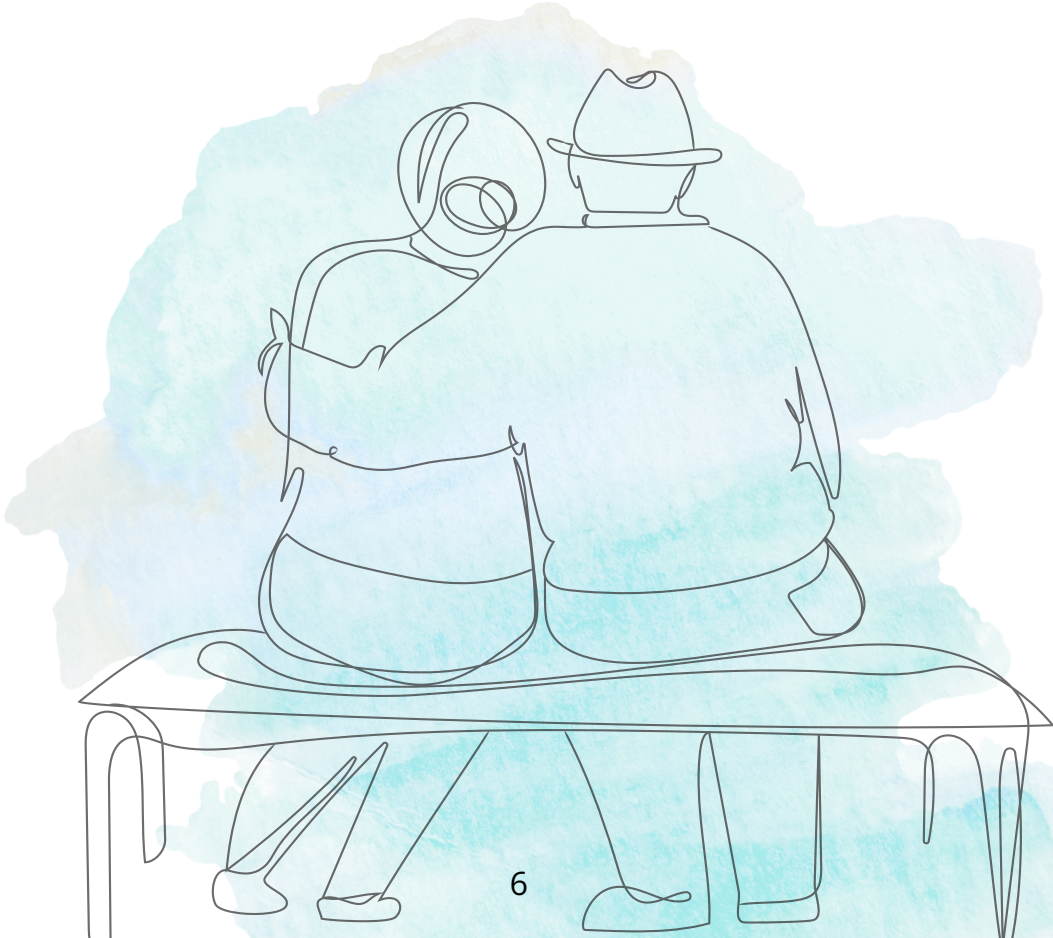


Who have we heard from, so far?

Since launching in March 2024, we have received over 300 submissions (written contributions) to *In Your Own Words* – and spoken to and heard from people at our engagement events.

We note that so far, the percentage of people² (identified in line with categories provided) providing submissions is as follows: 38% were former sub postmasters, 14% were current sub postmasters, 13% were members of the public, 12% were family members or friends of those impacted, 8% were children of former sub postmasters, 8% fell into the ‘other’ category and 7% were former or current Post Office Limited employees.

Overall, 77% of contributors have said that the events surrounding the Horizon scandal impacted their health and wellbeing significantly.



Health in context

In both the Human Impact testimony that was given by witnesses at hearings and in all of our engagement work to date the effect that the Horizon scandal has had on people's health is a recurring theme. On 10th April 2025, we hosted an engagement event where we focused on health and asked people to share their experiences with us.

What is the purpose of this paper?

When we refer to health in this paper, we mean an individual's physical and mental wellbeing. Where we refer to a health impact this means a change in the health of a person or group of people that arises from a particular factor or situation.

Through the submissions to the *In Your Own Words* project and at the April 2025 engagement event, we have gained a broader understanding of the health related issues that people have told us they experienced

In this paper, we will share some of these stories and summarise what we have been told by contributors to *In Your Own Words* about the effects of the Horizon scandal on their health.



Health Impacts: We asked and you said

Responses to *In Your Own Words* are gathered on the basis of three main questions:

-  **Tell us about how the Post Office Horizon IT scandal has impacted you**
-  **Tell us about what you would like to see in the future**
-  **What message would you like to give to others affected by the scandal**

We have summarised responses to these questions relating to health and present them under the themes that were mentioned most frequently.



Summary of responses relating to the health impacts of the Horizon scandal

The following section contains contents which some many find distressing including mention of suicide, self – harm, PTSD flashbacks, miscarriage and cancer

Mental Health

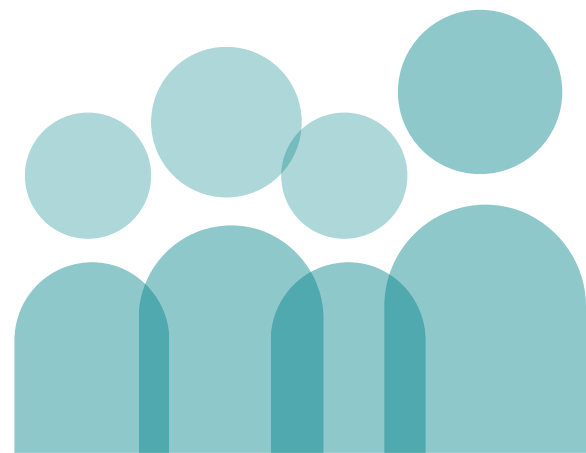
Many reported experiencing mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and suicidal thoughts as a result of events related to the Horizon scandal and issues with Horizon. They described these issues as having far reaching consequences in their day to day lives.

"I suffered depression, and I have been assessed by my consultant as potentially having PTSD."

"I couldn't cope with meeting people, I just needed darkness and silence, and I just cried and cried."

"The constant struggle with the faulty machine created immense stress and anxiety. Each day, we were faced with shortfalls that couldn't be explained or rectified. The pressure of these unexplained losses led to sleepless nights and constant worry about the future of our family and business. The feeling of being unable to trust the very system designed to support our work eroded our confidence and mental well-being."

"I have been diagnosed with ADHD, PTSD, depression and adjustment disorder. It would be dishonest of me if I told you I understood what all these mean, but I do notice that I struggle with time keeping, bright lights, deadlines, social situations, spreadsheets, basic admin, confrontations, anything not going to plan and I am extremely protective."



Mental Health

The severity of any health impact described varies by respondent, but a significant number reported requiring serious medical intervention and experiencing suicidal thoughts.

"My son tried to commit suicide."

"I always feared the worse and suicide for me was at one time in my thoughts."

"The stress began to turn to depression again and my partner put up with several years of me wanting to commit suicide. Doctors tried to figure it out by giving different pills because I never told them the real reason."

"(I was) Under psychiatric care for a few weeks due to having some schizophrenic episodes."

"My mum was suicidal, and the Samaritans helped save her life."

Loss of confidence and a sense of personal identity were common themes in responses submitted, with some people reporting that this contributed to a sense of isolation and loneliness.

"I lost myself. I moved to another part of the country, changed my name, refused any social invitation and became introverted and reclusive."

Shame and social withdrawal were common themes in health-related responses, with this sense of shame often driving people to stay indoors and shut themselves off from loved ones.

Feelings of worthlessness and being dismissed by their usual or expected support systems were described by many as having contributed to their mental health struggles.

Others reported struggling to seek help for their mental health for a range of reasons.

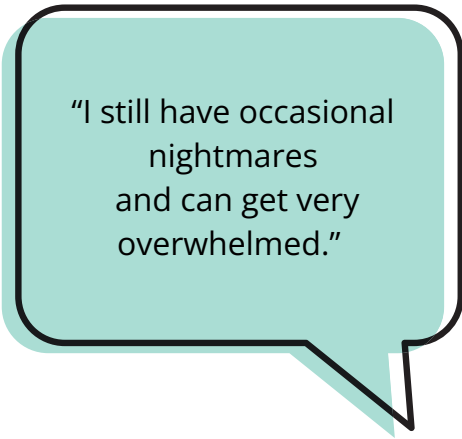
"She was painfully ashamed of being branded a thief... hiding in semi-darkness."

"I wasn't able to leave my house due to defamation of character."

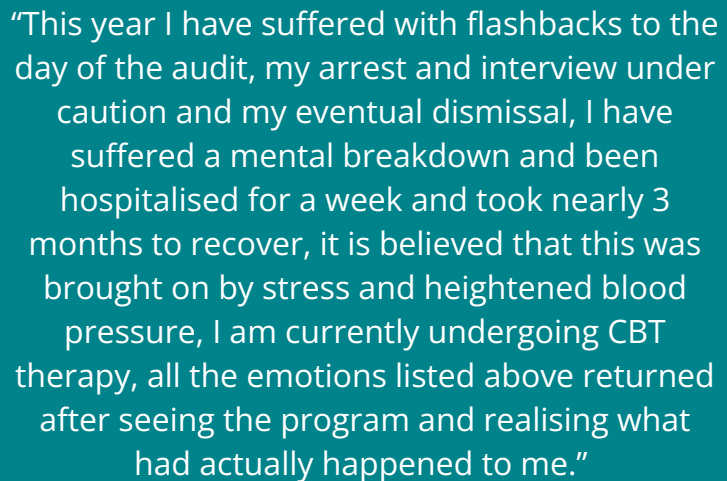
"My doctor called to see me, and said it was a nervous breakdown he wanted to start me on antidepressants, but I was reluctant to take them as I refused to believe that I had mental issues."

Mental Health

Longer term psychological effects were also described by respondents. Many described ongoing flashbacks, and a lasting sense of injustice.




"I still have occasional nightmares and can get very overwhelmed."

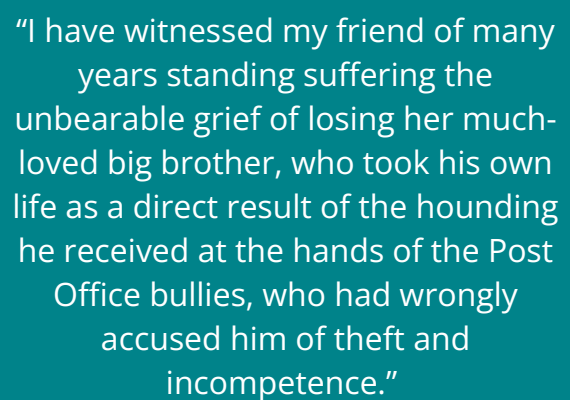


"This year I have suffered with flashbacks to the day of the audit, my arrest and interview under caution and my eventual dismissal, I have suffered a mental breakdown and been hospitalised for a week and took nearly 3 months to recover, it is believed that this was brought on by stress and heightened blood pressure, I am currently undergoing CBT therapy, all the emotions listed above returned after seeing the program and realising what had actually happened to me."

We also heard from many about the health impacts the Horizon scandal has had on their family and others close to them.



"Daughter was bullied in school and self-harmed..."



"I have witnessed my friend of many years standing suffering the unbearable grief of losing her much-loved big brother, who took his own life as a direct result of the hounding he received at the hands of the Post Office bullies, who had wrongly accused him of theft and incompetence."

Physical Health

Stress-related illnesses and conditions, such as chronic pain and fatigue, were frequently mentioned by respondents. These conditions were often reported as being manifestations of the mental distress caused by the scandal. Others described how the stress caused by Horizon issues intensified existing conditions.

"The anxiety and sleeplessness led to chronic fatigue."

"Stress was certainly a contributory factor according to my consultant."
(regarding cancer)

"My brother, during this time was facing immense pressure and also was suicidal, but unfortunately the cancer developed and his will to live no longer was there."

"My health was not great as I suffered quite a few stress related blackouts."

"My friend told me to stand within the Post Office and look at him (respondent's husband) saying that he was not the man who first took on the Post Office and how ill he looked. I took her advice and was truly shocked at what I saw.

The Post Office problems had caused us to become estranged and till that point I hadn't noticed the decline in my husband. It wasn't until he was rushed into hospital with a suspected heart attack that I realised the severity of his mental and physical condition."

"I ended up on anti-depressants and sleeping pills. I then had breast cancer with a double mastectomy which my family are convinced was brought on by the stress of all of this."

Physical Health

Others told us that in the aftermath of dealing with Horizon issues they experienced severe medical conditions, such as strokes, diabetes, and heart issues. Respondents said these conditions often impaired their quality of life.

“His physical health suffered, resulting in a severe stroke that left him disabled.”

“Now having diabetes, suffer from blood pressure and now nearly deaf and depressed.”

“I went from a physically fit active person who attended gyms 3-4 times weekly, to not being able to take part in any physical activities.”

Physical Health

Some responses described miscarriages, and the associated grief due to the stress they experienced with Horizon.

“I neglected my children, and the stress caused me to have a miscarriage.”

“We buried our child... I blame the post office in part for the tremendous stress.”

We also heard from many respondents who required and continue to require medication and long-term medical treatment to manage their health conditions.

“I also had deep vein thrombosis which can be caused by stress now on lifelong medication.”

“I suffer with chronic pain all over my body. Despite being on numerous prescription medicines, this is something that I suffer with on a day-to-day basis.”

“I was put on anti-depressants for my mental health (which I am still taking to this day).”

“I was diagnosed with depression when my son was 6 months old. I am still on antidepressants.”

While this paper focuses on health specifically, this was also a theme raised frequently in the engagement sessions held by the Inquiry. It was also referenced in our previous paper on family and relationships – you can read more about this here:

[In Your Own Words: Family and Relationships Paper](#)

Conclusion and next steps

In Your Own Words is still open for new submissions. We are still listening and would like to hear from more people impacted by the Post Office Horizon IT scandal.

We are particularly keen to hear more from:

- Minority ethnic communities.
- Members of communities whose local post office was affected by Horizon issues.
- Former or current Post Office Limited employees.
- Former or current Fujitsu employees.

If you would like to share your story, and require an alternative format please contact us at POengagement@postofficehorizoninquiry.org.uk.

Sir Wyn Williams and all in the Post Office Horizon IT Inquiry team would like to extend their sincere thanks to everyone who has shared their story so far through *In Your Own Words*, by attending engagement events, and contributing in other ways to this project.



www.postofficehorizoninquiry.org.uk/InYourOwnWords

Endnotes

1. [In Your Own Words: Family and Relationships Paper.](#)

2. Contributors to *In Your Own Words* identify themselves in line with the categories that are set out by the Inquiry. The percentages set out here are based on the proportion of responses provided by people who have described themselves according to these categories.

