

# Why having good mental health isn't a right anymore?

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*Guest blog: The author of this powerful story, about the impact a concentrated flight path had on his mental health, has requested we do not reveal his identity.*

If 10 years ago, when I bought my house, someone had said to me 'one day you will be writing a blog on the effect of airplane noise on your mental health', I may have paused for a thought, but after a mere second into that, would have completely dismissed it. Surely, the government would have to protect us from such a ludicrous suggestion, wouldn't they?

10 years later, it turns out I would have been wrong. Not when it comes to the airspace anyhow. We all know the government wants more planes in the sky. Theresa May wants to let the rest of the world know "*the UK is open for business,*" but no matter the cost to the health of the public it seems.

I don't want to get into the politics of what is right for the UK or not, I just want my pain to go away. The feeling of helplessness, anxiety and 'feeling trapped' are now what I feel when I lay in bed at night.

Before I get too deep into how it feels to be depressed, I would like to let you know how I became this way. The Department of Transport in 2013 made the decision to reduce the number of people effected by plane noise and pollution. Sounds great, right? What did they do, reduce the number of night flights or reduce the number of flights in general? No? Go on tell me, I sense you are thinking. They made the decision to concentrate all the flights over one area of a flight path. One flight path is around 3km wide, so all the planes that used that 3km wide flight path are now flying within a very small narrow corridor.

The issue is now the technology used is so perfect a plane will follow the plane before, in exactly the same place and so on. Yes, on paper I guess it looked like it worked; less people should notice air traffic noise. I am not sure they noticed it before anyhow, I didn't and I have lived in Hounslow, Twickenham, Teddington and Richmond before I bought a house 10 miles away from Heathrow. Their efforts to reduce the noise have in fact made matters so much worse for the fewer people under these flight paths than they ever were for the people they have reduced it for. So, now you know, I live under one of these concentrated flight paths.

So, back to mental health. It started off me being woken up by late flying planes and generally being upset with the increase in noise. I started to call Heathrow and ask what has happened, not knowing what a flight path was; I would ask questions like "*have you changed the flight paths?*" to which they would reply "*no.*" They were technically right and played off my lack of knowledge on flight paths.

It continued to get worse and worse, so bad in fact I had to leave my job in the city. I just wasn't sleeping and didn't understand why. Heathrow told me they hadn't changed anything; it must be me, I thought.

This year the concentrated flight path got too much for me. One night I woke up at 3am and started to have a panic attack – it hit me, I had cracked. The signs were there:

- I had started to feel anxious about going to bed.
- I was becoming down at the thought of not sleeping.
- I would wait until I knew the last plane had gone over before I even went to the bedroom.
- I never had a panic attack before, I couldn't breathe, my heart was beating so fast.
- I started to shout out ***"it is the noise, please stop the noise!"***

When we are on an easterly wind, this is when the planes are bad for me. I would now watch the weather on the news. Please don't be on an easterly wind tomorrow, I would pray, oh thank god no easterly wind. *"Now for the weekend's weather, we have a strong wind coming from the east on Saturday"* the weather presentation would say. Oh shit, oh shit. My panic was setting in, it was only Thursday but I knew the weekend would be non-stop noise. That night I would lie in bed, with my eyes filling up with tears knowing the noise was coming. That humming sound you hear in the distance that turns into a thunder across your house. Soon that will be over me and it will not stop until Heathrow wants it to stop.

Sounds bad, but unbelievably it is getting worse.

One month ago, we had 2 weeks or so of easterly winds. This meant I had planes over me from 6am to 11.30pm (most nights it would be in fact midnight or later, due to delays at Heathrow). I broke down. I started to hit things, I couldn't control myself. I wanted to kill myself to get away from the noise. This noise had become too much for me to take. This noise was in the same place over and over again. As I lay down on my knees, with tears rushing down my face, my hands holding my head up from falling any lower, thinking of ways to end it, the only thing that stopped me was my dog had come up to me and pushed my hands away from my face with his nose. I looked at him, gripped his lead, ran with him to the car and drove off to the countryside, just to get away from the noise.

Now when the noise is bad, I do that same drive and stay in the same place. That is my way for dealing with the noise. I am lucky, I have savings I can live off for 12 months or so. Other people in similar situations may not have the funds to live off and have to live with the noise, they can't run away.

Why am I writing about this? I don't want you to feel sorry for me. I just want to let you know the effects of these concentrated flight paths, a real-life situation. Not something the government has written down on paper. I am more than a number or a statistic. I believe the government wants to increase the number of concentrated flight paths to increase the number of flights out of Heathrow. My story could become your story. We should be protected from this noise; like the guy 10 years ago thought too.

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(Highlights, footnotes and minor edits may have been added, but only to add analysis & clarification)