



Domestic Abuse & Mental Health



By

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Voices of Experience

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Aims & Objectives

After the success of year one of the project, the aim of second year is to focus on the mental health topics and to work on how to approach services better. Raise awareness and to understand what helped and what could be done more to challenge stigma.

There were a few common mental health topics that caused domestic abuse in the community that participants in year 1 of the project had requested to work on 2nd year.

Here is a list of the following topics:

- Challenge stigma related issues
- To understand what are the common issues on mental health
- Cultural understandings
- How to get help and signpost information
- What helped and what needs improving in services
- Stereotypes and Gender issues
- How is domestic abuse impacting on mental wellbeing
- Human rights issues
- Art activity
- Recording lived experiences
- Moving Minds Festival

To reach the projects aim, 3 volunteers will be involved from the community leadership.

Challenges

- Limitation to funding as venue and childcare issues have been expressed by the participants
- Numbers of the group members have been dropped as no therapies or mindfulness is available
- Other mental health awareness sessions already in place at many organisations.

Planning & Researching

- Community leadership meetings
- Visiting organisations/focus groups
- Lived experience stories shared
- Online research

Information gathering was successful with participants willing to express their personal lived experiences. Stories from the lived experiences helped in understanding the key points and planning ahead. Reading information and hearing lived experience stories can give a complete new outlook to what the impacts are and how recovery was discovered.

Community leadership meetings were useful as all the volunteers had experience in delivering mental health and stigma awareness sessions.

Visiting organisations and focus groups gave an insight into the backgrounds of the participants and how much information was available. This was a great help for the projects aim and planning sessions. All sessions were planned according to the group's requirements and needs.

Challenges

- There was a lot of stigma around participants when talking about mental health and domestic abuse issues
- Gender Issues – Men's focus group were hard to reach as stigma and few organisations required training instead of talks?
- Due to confidentiality and sensitivity issues, some organisations refused to allow sessions
- Cultural issues were discussed as many participants shared views on how mental health and domestic abuse is stigma and not openly talked about. There is a gap in understanding mental health with cultural views.
- Childcare issues were raised due to funding and venue
- Participants required extra therapies and mindfulness training but did not take due to the limitation of funding
- Figures of the participants were reduced due having not met with the requirements requested

Awareness Raising Sessions

All 6 sessions were structured into 5 steps:

1. Understanding mental health/stigma issues and signs
2. Get participants into groups/pairs to share views and opinions. This would also help engage, participate and give them the confidence to talk.
3. A case study was designed to identify what helps and what wouldn't help when one would be a victim of domestic abuse and how that would impact on mental wellbeing. This would assure individuals of their own confidentiality issues.
4. Signpost information and talk about overall session - What kind of help should there be and what needs improving. This would give an insight if the information helped and to evaluate the session.
5. Finally as an activity design an art piece to voice out their view on the whole of mental health and domestic issues, which then be exhibited at the Moving Minds Festival on the 10th October 2015.

Gender stereotypes was a topic which participants mostly discussed when understanding how domestic abuse would typically start. Individuals expressed that traditional gender refers to men's and women's roles and responsibilities which then creates expectations to believe that a male would automatically be aggressive and a female non aggressive. Culture would support this and allow the victims to accept abuse and ignore mental health issues. Gender based abuse can have a huge amount of impact on mental health.

Participants expressed to gain more information on depression, panic attacks and anxiety. These are the most commonly issues that surround victims of domestic abuse. This can also lead on to further more serious mental health problems as expressed by the participants. Group and art activities were used to explore and engage. Using the flipchart, the group doodled out in different languages what impacts of mental health issues can impact on victims and their carers/families. Mindfulness and other relevant information had been given out to help participants.

Human rights – to help understand what are the gaps between services and service users, a small activity was used to explore what are the rights and are they achieved. This helped the evaluation and the project to achieve one of its aims. Participant's expressed a lot of issues relation to rights.

Art activities were done to engage with the participants, such as:

- Play dough – to make and break shapes to exercise on how to divert negative thoughts can be as little as playing with play dough.
- Sketching out images of what makes u depressed, expressing views and thoughts of what they feel and understand.
- "What I want" is an activity used to write on post notes what stressed us, what we need more or less and what helps us. Activities give the group members the opportunity to express and talk about stigma related issues.
- Making a positive card – to give hope as a message to a friend or a family would end a session on a positive note.
- Mindfulness Chat – Participants would share as a tip of advice, what chore or activity in their everyday life helps. This was followed by picture cards to support their recommendation.

Evaluation

To understand better if the anti-stigma message was delivered, a short evaluation was carried out. Writing it on a flipchart in a group or one of the participants would volunteer to draw smiley or sad faces to express how the group found the sessions.

Challenges

During sessions evaluation these were the few points that participants expressed:

- Language Barrier – leaflets in other language required
- Religious / cultural information – cultural difference don't agree
- Venue – outdoor activities required
- Therapies / mindfulness trainings

Moving Minds Festival

A stall was held at the Moving Minds Festival to promote and showcase the art design. A volunteer from the community leadership project was helped collecting information from the audience on their views of mental health. Positive, negative mental health and barriers were the topic issues that the public raised. Many left positive messages to promote positive mental health and to challenge stigma. This also had influenced people to sign up to VOX and become members to help volunteer in promoting positive mental health.



Mind Map Design

An exhibition of a mind map of domestic abuse & mental health was designed to be displayed at the Moving Minds Festival. This is an illustration of the aims and objectives of the project and gives an insight of sessions delivered to the groups.



The mind map has 4 strands leading on to the information the participants expressed.

Strand 1 Impacts – Different kinds of impacts can affect your mental health by domestic abuse leading on to negative thoughts and physical symptoms.

Strand 2 Recovery & Support – Information on services and where you can go for support or advice. What services offer and how your GP can refer you to services that are available

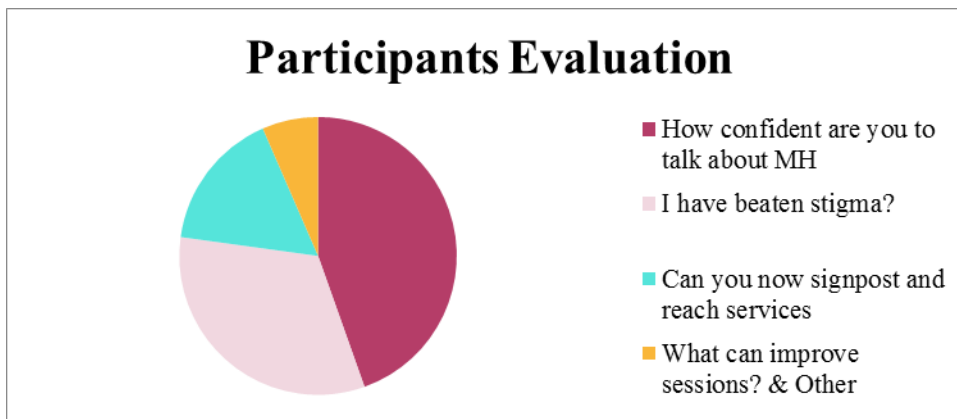
Strand 3 Positive Messages - After each session the participants would leave with positive messages to show support and tell people that recovery is possible and help is always there

Strand 4 Looking After Yourself – Tips and methods that can help reduce stress. Little things that you can do in your everyday lifestyle to live a healthy happy life.

Conclusion

The 2nd year of this project has been successful by achieving its aims and objectives. Participants have felt confident throughout the sessions when talking about mental health. However there were challenges which were due to the funding which prevented the project to reach a wider population in the community. Talking about domestic abuse issues to women was challenging as women feared of being exposed to something they feel might draw a negative impact in the community. Activities and group work helped women open up and talk. Participants enjoyed doing art activities and positive messages after each session.

Evaluating each session was a great help to the project. This gave the project a boost in understand basic needs of what was lacking in delivering awareness raising sessions and what helped.



- Sharing experiences – I now feel I am not alone
- Helping each other to signpost – now I know there is help in the community and I can talk to community members
- Group chat – I don't have to worry about what I might say? Or worry about not making sense
- Activities – so much fun, I can now enjoy the session and not only talk. I like to express using art. Art has always been my way of communication. This helps us enjoy the session.

Successes

Assuring each other that there is no right or wrong answer to defining what is mental health made it easier for the participants to challenge stigma. Understanding that mental health is positive and can be negative which can impact on anyone was one of the key messages which the project has delivered successfully.

- Over 7 organisations have been approached
- More than 25 women have been involved in this project
- 2 volunteers will be helping in talking about lived experiences
- Many participants want to volunteer and have become members with VOX
- More follow up sessions are required
- All participants have expressed in an art piece which will be exhibited in Moving minds festival the success of the project.

Challenges

Some focus groups had requested if session can provide mindfulness training or therapies along with the information. This was difficult to reach due to limitations to funds.

Childcare / Holidays – there were issues around many participants that could not attend sessions due to childcare and school holidays. Many requested if the project can fund this which again was not possible due to the limitations on funds.

Many organisations/women's aid already had mental health awareness project in place.

Men's groups were hard to reach as there is a lot stigma around talking about domestic abuse issues. This is also as mainly most actions are carried out by men against women.

Future Planning

As the successes of year 1 and 2, the aim of 3rd year would be to focus on men's groups as well as women's. If the project can be granted funds then it will be possible to reach a wider range of the community around Scotland.