

Barbers in Arms Project:

Pilot Evaluation with Glasgow Clyde College

Please note that the findings presented in this report (obtained from the preand-post workshop survey and focus group) relate only to the content as delivered on the day of the initial pilot workshop. Future iterations of the workshop, including any changes to content or the format of delivery will require separate evaluation.

The Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (SVRU) designs and supports multi-agency, innovative pilot approaches to tackling violence in Scotland. Supported by the Scottish Government and Scottish Police Authority, the unit has adopted a public health approach, treating violence as an infection, which can be cured. We are interested in helping to develop and pilot projects working in the prevention arena with a focus on mental health, substance misuse and childhood trauma as it relates to interpersonal violence or self-directed violence (e.g. self-harm, suicidal ideation or suicide attempts).

Suicidality in Scotland

Suicide by men outnumber those by women in every country of the world. In 2022, 762 suicides were registered in Scotland (National Records of Scotland, 2023), 556 of which were men. These statistics tell us that, during this period, men were almost three times more likely to take their own life than women. Those living in deprived areas also have a higher suicide rate compared to those in the least deprived areas. As a result, suicide prevention has been highlighted as a national public health priority (Scottish Government, 2018).

Self-harm is defined as intentional self-injury or self-poisoning irrespective of suicidal intent. A national prevalence study conducted by researchers in Scotland in 2018, highlighted that 1 in 10 young men aged 18-34 had harmed themselves at some point in their lives (O'Connor et al., 2018). This is concerning as self-harm is indicative of intolerable psychological distress, and individuals who harm themselves are at a greater risk of suicide in the future.

Suicide in men is a complex issue encompassing a wide range of risk factors across the lifespan, from early childhood experiences to mental illness, masculinity, social context and negative life events (Richardson et al., 2021a). Interviews conducted with men who had engaged in self-harm and/or had thought about, or attempted suicide in Scotland demonstrated that the majority of men acknowledged that they needed help but were either unable to reach out for help or did not know where to seek it (Chandler, 2021). They spoke of specific challenges in finding appropriate spaces in which to talk about their problems or feelings. Taken together, these research findings suggest that men may be ready to seek help, but do not know how or where to seek help, or may not even recognise that they are worthy of help, and that having someone approach them first could be a useful step forward (Richardson, 2021b).

Public health initiatives linked to barbershops have shown promise in addressing disparities in health outcomes for men (Ogborn et al., 2022). As a result there is growing interest in building partnerships with barbers to deliver community-based mental health programmes. Barbershops offer an environment in which clients can talk openly with their barbers about health and personal issues (Roper et al., 2016). A recent study led by the male mental health charity The Lions Barber Collective (2019) found that over half of the 1908 men they surveyed in Britain felt more comfortable talking to their barber about mental health difficulties, such as depression, than their GP. As such, barbershops could be considered a suitable

setting in which to monitor for signs of mental ill health and provide information about local health services.

The current project

The SVRU (in collaboration with Brothers in Arms Scotland and The University of Strathclyde) have developed a pilot prevention project in Glasgow involving local barbers. A workshop has been co-developed with a group of barbers and people with lived experience of suicidal thoughts, behaviours, and bereavement by suicide. The aim of the workshop is to upskill barbers in “reaching in” to open up conversations about male mental health and suicide when cutting men’s hair. Clients will be signposted to Brothers in Arms Scotland, who will provide the “aftercare” element of the partnership.

Two co-development sessions took place and focused on the following aspects:

- What the workshop needs to include?
- What kind of “reach-in” conversations are we talking about and how can we start them?
- What are the potential risks and challenges to this approach and how can we manage/navigate them?
- How do we look after our barbers when they are initiating and engaging in these conversations?

Based on the discussions within these sessions, a one-day workshop was created. In line with the intended objectives, it is anticipated that upon completion of the workshop, participants will be able to:

- Examine the theoretical frameworks underpinning this workshop (e.g. Bystander Theory and Scot Government’s ‘Assistance Theory’).
- Describe the impact of male suicide statistics in the UK.
- Initiate a ‘reach-in’ conversation with clients
- Outline actions on a disclosure from someone in or near crisis
- Recognise the impact of alcohol and drugs on our brain and behaviour
- Describe the power of vulnerability as detailed by Brene Brown
- Apply a reflective practice tool for self-care
- Demonstrate listening and responding skills.

It is important to note that the current evaluation focuses on examining the *learning* acquired by participants following the training, rather than examining the impact of the “reach in conversation” intervention on clients themselves.

Glasgow Clyde College Pilot Project

The workshop has since been piloted with and delivered to a class of Level 6 Hairdressing students at the Glasgow Clyde College Cardonald Campus. The workshop included a lived experience input from a male police officer who shared his own experiences of living with suicidal thoughts and engaging in suicidal behaviours.

Attendees’ knowledge was tested with a ten-item quiz, and they had the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to initiate “reach in” conversations (as well as their

listening and responding skills) to the facilitators during the role play exercises. They were also asked to complete a short anonymous survey prior to attending the workshop and again upon completion of the workshop. The survey assessed their perceptions of their own knowledge regarding the topics covered and how confident participants felt in the practical application of the skills and tools they had been presented with during the session.

Following completion of the post-workshop survey, a small focus group was conducted in-person at the college. Thirteen participants were able to attend and provide feedback. The focus group was co-facilitated by the SVRU Analyst Researcher and a Researcher from the University of Strathclyde. Discussions were structured around:

- What went well?
- What could have been better?
- Whether there had been the opportunity for attendees to apply and use their learning from the workshop within the workplace?

The session was transcribed verbatim and the key learning points are summarised below. All names provided are pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the participants.

Results

Attendees were able to answer all quiz questions correctly on the day of the workshop. When examining the data collected using the pre-and-post workshop surveys, it can be seen that following the session, a higher percentage of attendees reported their knowledge to be “good” or “very good” regarding: (a) statistics related to the impact of male suicide in Scotland (b) actions to take following a disclosure from someone in (or near) crisis and (c) the impact of alcohol on the brain and behaviour (Table 1).

Table 1: Percentage of attendees who perceived their knowledge in relation to intended learning outcomes to be “Good” or “Very Good” before and after attending the workshop.

Perceived level of knowledge regarding...	Statistics on the impact of male suicide in Scotland		Actions to take following a disclosure from someone in (or near) crisis.		The impact of alcohol and drugs on the brain and behaviour.	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
	21%	57%	33%	90%	56%	96%

Similarly, following the workshop, a higher proportion of attendees reported that their confidence in their own ability to practically apply the skills that they had learned was “high” or “very high”. More specifically, attendees felt more confident in: (a) initiating “reach in” conversations with clients about mental health and suicide, (b) applying reflective practice tool(s) for self-care, and (c) demonstrating listening and responding skills (Table 2). Furthermore, all attendees reported that they found the workshop to be a valuable use of their time.

Table 2: Confidence in the practical application of intended learning outcomes before and after participating in the workshop.

Level of confidence in...	Initiating “reach in” conversations with clients about mental health and suicide.		Applying reflective practice tool(s) for self-care.		Demonstrating listening and responding skills.	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
	29%	57%	33%	90%	48%	87%

It is important to interpret these quantitative findings within the limitations of the evaluation methodology that was implemented. As the survey was anonymous, it is not possible to match the responses of each participant over time to examine whether knowledge and confidence had increased in specific *individuals*. However, it was anticipated that the anonymity offered within the survey would encourage the participants to provide the most honest responses. In addition, it is important to note that there was a significant drop off (of around 42%) in the number of attendees who completed the survey prior to the workshop (n=52) and after the workshop (n=30). As such, it is important to consider that these findings regarding knowledge and confidence, may not be representative of the experience of those who did not complete the survey following the workshop. Given the small number of participants who completed both the pre-and-post survey, it is not possible to determine whether any increase in knowledge is *statistically significant*. However, these results do allow us to characterise and describe this group of participants before and after participation in the workshop.

Focus group.

Overall, the feedback provided during the focus group discussions were positive. Attendees highlighted that by attending the workshop, they hoped to improve their understanding of mental health, as well as develop practical skills to help them (a) identify if a client is struggling, (b) initiate mental health conversations and (c) direct their clients to appropriate additional support. Within the focus group, attendees provided examples of the ways that the workshop had supported them in improving

their knowledge and confidence in applying these skills. The key themes from the discussion are summarised below.

1. The workshop helped attendees see the value of training of this nature for hairdressers/barbers and identify the number of people it could help.

For those who came into the workshop and could already see the potential value in hairdressers/barbers to undertaking this training around “reach in” conversations, the workshop reinforced this perspective. It also emphasised to them the number of clients that they may be able to support by initiating these conversations.

“Going in, I definitely thought it would be useful to know more about the topic and have these tools that we can use...and it was. I was interested in identifying the signs and different behaviours someone might portray when they are struggling or how you can help, and I feel like we got that”.

“Initially for me, I thought that it may be a small minority that would benefit from this approach and then I think after learning about all the statistics, it opened my eyes to see that we actually need this for every client. You know...I thought it might be nice to have a little bit of training because you might come across one two that you may be able to help but actually the workshop helped me to see that the training can probably help everyone that we work with in some way...in small ways or in big ways”.

Those who were initially more sceptical around the feasibility of applying the training in a busy salon, highlighted that the training had changed their thoughts around this and noted that they could see how it would make a difference to the clients that they work with. These discussions also highlighted the importance of managing expectations in advance of the workshop to ease any concerns (i.e. making it clear to attendees that they would be provided with the information and tools to initiate “reach in” conversation and signpost to additional support, but that they would not be expected to navigate these conversations in the same depth as trained therapists).

“At first when we were told that we were going to be having this training. I was quite sceptical. I thought it was interesting and I wanted to hear more about it but when I was hearing about it, I thought, how are we gonna be able to do that if we're in a salon environment...y'know just thinking about how busy that would be. So, I did. I did feel a bit sceptical about it. If it felt like it was going to be a really big thing we were going to have to do...if that makes sense. Like, really big to take on...especially by people who are not trained psychologists or therapists or whatever. But actually, after the training, I could totally see how or why this is being attempted and how it would make a real difference to our clients”

2. The importance of having information and tools to hand

Attendees consistently highlighted that one of the main strengths of the workshops was that it included information on the topic alongside practical tools that attendees could apply in the workplace. It was emphasised that both components were necessary for attendees to feel more comfortable initiating “reach in” conversations following the workshop. It was highlighted that there are various campaigns that encourage people to start conversations with someone who may be struggling, but do not provide practical insights into doing so. As such, the provision of practical tools within the workshop is key.

“I was interested in knowing more about how we might identify if someone is going through a hard time and needs help. You can only help if you know what to look out for...so it is great to have that awareness. The workshop not only helped understand how to help...but also who might need help too. Both are really important”.

“A lot of campaigns go...if someone is struggling...you should really be talking to them. But it is tough to know where to start, so the biggest stumbling block in a way is knowing what to do when someone does disclose it...because you can become a bit tongue tied and get worried you will say the wrong thing. You want to help and you have the best intentions but you just don't know how. What this training gives people is some good examples of how to do that, tools that they can use, and somewhere to signpost people to as well”.

“Sometimes people might not have experienced something like the person who is struggling has and so they can't possibly understand how they are feeling or really do anything about it. But like...having these tools where you could say...I can't physically do anything to change your situations ...but here is a good place for you to go and chat to someone who might be able to help you...or who might be able to give you coping mechanisms you can use until you're in a better place. That is a way that we can help people even if we don't fully get what they are going through”.

3. Helping (but also empowering) clients

The attendees highlighted that they believed that the nature of their role combined with the information and tools they were provided with would allow them not only to help clients, but to empower them. More specifically, it was highlighted that people build trust over time with their hairdressers, are relaxed in the chair, and often spend hours at a time with them. This creates the opportunity for clients to have conversations with their hairdresser about their personal lives and current situations.

This means that they can often identify changes in a person that indicate that they are struggling and that they would feel comfortable initiating conversation about mental health and empowering them seek support.

“The training really helped us see ways that we could approach clients without being too invasive or putting them (or us) in an awkward situation. Like we have conversations with people about their lives every day so the training showed how we could weave in these points about mental health in and also be led by the clients on how far down the path we take that conversation. Some people won't want to talk about it whilst others might be happy to and will use the signposting information. It is about empowering the client within that situation as well.”

“I think its good because you can sit and listen to somebody...and even if you haven't felt that way yourself you can say well what about this...have you heard about Brothers in Arms? By doing that you don't feel like you're putting it on someone or forcing it on someone either...because you are giving them the choice to go and have a look...or to use it...or to put it in their pocket for later. They are still completely in control of the situation abut you feel like you are able to help”.

“This is needed, particularly more so in the current climate. It used to be that if you were struggling with your mental health, you would go to your Dr. But they are so stretched...it is impossible to get an appointment...and when you are in there it is so rushed, and you feel like they just don't have the time to listen to you. They maybe get three minutes with the Dr, whereas we get people in our chair for four or five hours sometimes and you build up that trust over time and they can sit in your chair and offload. So, we have the chance to make a difference...you make a client look better in your chair but sometimes just having that time to spend talking to them will make them feel better too because you've got that power to change someone's mindset, let them know they are not alone, and give them the information to take the next step themselves. It can make such a difference and I think having the information, the skills, and the tools from this training will really help...because now we know what to do in that situation”.

4. Most valuable aspects of the workshop

When asked about the most valuable aspects of the workshop, attendees consistently highlighted that the provision of both information and tools was the most valuable aspect of the training. In terms of the knowledge that was shared, the following aspects were highlighted:

- *Lived experience input.*

As mentioned previously, the workshop included a lived experience input from a male police officer who shared his own experiences of living with suicidal thoughts and engaging in suicidal behaviours. This was consistently reported as one of the most valuable aspects of the workshop and was a key component of the learning that took place. This input increased the attendees understanding around the nature

of suicidal thoughts and behaviour as well as emphasising that anyone can struggle with (and require support for) their mental health.

“It was just really eye opening and helped me to understand mental health better”
“It showed that the people we expect to be the most resilient might struggle too. You think...oh a police officer...that shouldn’t happen to them...but see at the end of the day when people are facing really difficult situations in their job or in their lives...then it gets to them, and dealing with that every day well it doesn’t get any easier...so its understandable that he ended up feeling how he was feeling. It just shows that just because someone is good at keeping it away or seems resilient...you should just have the conversation and make sure that they know there is support for them. At the end of the day...we are all human and anyone could find themselves in that situation”.

“It helped me understand more about suicide. One of the amazing things he said was that he absolutely 100% thought he was doing everyone a favour and that it was better to disappear from everyone. I always thought that suicide was quite selfish because they are thinking about themselves. But that taught me that he was thinking about his kids, his family, his colleagues...and he thought he was doing them a favour and that they be better off without him – so that was really eye opening and important for me (and all of us) to learn”

- *The impact of alcohol and/or drugs on our brain and behaviour.*

Discussions around the ways that alcohol and drugs can influence how people feel and behave were also highlighted as being interesting and valuable learning that the attendees were keen to share with their clients and others. In particular, it was believed that this may help clients see patterns in how their use of drugs and/or alcohol may be contributing to the way they are feeling at that time.

“I think sometimes people may wake up on a Monday morning and think oh my god...I am feeling really awful...I just don’t even want to be here. Even just having a conversation with your hairdresser or your barber, where they point out that this could just be a part of their hangover...or part of their drug taking...like pointing that out might make them see the pattern and that it’ll pass and they might feel better by Wednesday/Thursday...so there is an end to how they are feeling. When they are in that bubble, they might just need someone to help then see it’ll pass”.

“It was helpful to know about suicide, but also the things that can contribute to it, and even just to be able to have those conversations with clients about, like oh, did you know this? It is helpful even just for us to know this kind of thing.”

- *The difference between sympathy and empathy.*

The discussions around the difference between sympathy and empathy (from the perspective of Bene Brown) were also highlighted by attendees as powerful and valuable learning that they would seek to apply in initiating mental health conversations with clients. In particular, the idea that “empathy drives connection and sympathy drives disconnection”.

“I think especially if you’ve never experienced something like the person is experiencing, it is easy to just go...sorry you feel that way, but it’ll get better, you’ll be fine, you just need time, it’s not that bad. But when someone is feeling that way, they think that day is never going to come and that they might never feel better, so it’s almost like you are invalidating the way they are feeling at that time...which doesn’t help them. So, it was good to have those conversations about sympathy and empathy and how we can all be more compassionate and empathetic when speaking to someone who may be struggling”.

- *Opportunity for group bonding.*

Some participants described the workshop as an opportunity for them to bond and become closer as a group. This was the case as the group was open and honest in their discussions and some shared stories of their own (or family members) mental health struggles.

“I feel like I learned a lot but also it felt good as a group to come together, have conversations about this topic, and share stories. I definitely felt like it was a bit of a bonding thing – because the statistics and the stories got everybody”.

The group noted that the workshop taught them that small everyday actions and interactions can make a difference in terms of creating a safe space for someone.

5. Applying the learning from the workshop

The attendees reported that the workshop has strengthened their ability to (a) identify if a client is struggling, (b) initiate mental health conversations and (c) direct their clients to appropriate additional support. A few students were able to provide examples of using this knowledge and applying these skills in practice. In addition, attendees highlighted that as well as believing that this learning will be useful within the workplace, it would also be valuable in terms of their personal lives too.

“I think it is helpful in our work setting but also just overall...just in our day-to-day life”

“We can use it at different levels. So, with our clients...but also with students or colleagues. Like...you're not yourself today, or you seem like you're not having the best day. Do you want to have a chat about it. Just creating that space even outside of work to have those conversations”.

“It not just about the clients either, it's about students, your family, your neighbours, your colleagues and the list just goes on and on. It'll help with all the relationships you have in your life.”

6. Next steps

Whilst the feedback was overall very positive, some helpful suggestions for possible improvements and next steps were also identified. The attendees suggested that one way to strengthen the training further was to provide additional opportunities for them to engage in role play scenarios to gain experience practically applying what they had learned. It was suggested that it would be helpful for each attendee to have the opportunity to practice a role play with a “client” at different points of interventions. For example:

- a) Where someone is struggling and isn't their usual self but isn't keen to open up and discuss further, so you provide them with information.
- b) Where someone is struggling and is open to discussing it further, so you initiate that discussion and signpost and
- c) Where someone may be in crisis and requires intervention/help.

It was suggested that it would be helpful to have this role-play session on the same day as the information and examples of how to have these conversations have been provided. This was proposed as it will be fresh in the attendees' mind and would let people practice these conversations in a safe space and also receive feedback from the facilitators on what they did well and what could have been better in each situation. Related to this, it was suggested that it may be helpful to have some video examples of these conversations within a salon in order that attendees could see how they conversations may unfold prior to role-playing the scenario themselves.

An interesting and important next step suggested for the training was around selfcare, for hairdressers in general and for those initiating the mental health conversations. This is the case as it was recognised that in listening to people's challenges all day can have an impact on hairdressers' moods, leaving them feeling quite low and at times like client's difficulties weigh heavily on their shoulders. As such, it is important to support them to look after their own mental health (and incorporate advice and tools for doing so in the training). It was also suggested that there could be a peer support component to this to encourage hairdressers to look out for their colleagues.

The current workshop was delivered in person and on campus. It was emphasised that this model should be replicated for future sessions, rather than adapting it to an online platform. This was the case as the attendees believe that the input was more beneficial and powerful because of the facilitators being there in person.

Conclusion

Overall participants found the workshop to be a valuable experience. They reported that the content was informative and that it was delivered and explained well. The provision of both information and tools was highlighted as a key strength. Some useful suggestions were made regarding improvements and next steps. Further evaluation is required to establish the impact of this training programme in relation to the intended learning outcomes.

How can I access support if I need it?

Breathing Space

Free confidential phone and web-based service for people experiencing low mood, depression or anxiety.

Weekdays: Monday – Thursday 6pm – 2am Weekend: Friday 6pm – Monday 6am

Contact: 0800 83 85 87 www.breathingspace.scot

Brothers in Arms

BIAs mission is to empower men to open up, take control and self-manage their mental wellbeing.

<https://brothersinarmsscotland.co.uk/>

Please note, they are not a crisis service. If you're experiencing thoughts of harming yourself or taking your life please contact Samaritans on 116 123.

Samaritans

Free confidential phone and web-based service providing emotional support to anyone in emotional distress, struggling to cope, or at risk of suicide throughout the United Kingdom and Ireland. This is a 24-hour service. Contact: 116 123

www.samaritans.org

Shout

Shout 85258 is a free, confidential, 24/7 text messaging support service for anyone who is struggling to cope. Their trained volunteers are there for you 24/7 to listen and support you to get to a calmer and safe place. Shout is a free, confidential, anonymous service for anyone in the UK. It won't appear on your phone bill.

If you're feeling low, anxious, worried, lonely, overwhelmed, suicidal or not quite yourself, their service is there to support you. To start a conversation, text the word 'SHOUT' to 85258. If your life is at imminent risk, please call the emergency services on 999.

Local GP

Visit your local GP to discuss any issues you may be concerned about and for information of available local support services. www.nhs.uk/service-search

NHS 24

If you need urgent health advice when your GP Practice is closed. Contact: 111
www.nhs24.scot

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