

The University of Sheffield: Taking a Trauma Informed Approach

There is a growing interest across health and social care settings of the value of recognising the experience of trauma/childhood trauma is widespread and the impact of trauma on individuals and communities and how this recognition should drive service design and development. Referred to as a trauma informed approach, this is increasingly being adopted by a wide range of organisations and educational establishments.

A trauma-informed approach recognises that trauma can significantly impact an individual's neurological, biological, psychological, and social development. This approach aims to increase practitioners' awareness of how trauma can negatively impact individuals and communities, and their ability to feel safe or develop trusting relationships with health and care services. It seeks to avoid re-traumatisation and works towards creating culturally sensitive, safe services that people trust and want to use. This approach shifts the focus from asking "What's wrong with you?" to "What happened to you?", fostering empathy and understanding.

The University of Sheffield has set out an ambition to adopt a trauma-informed approach to Student Support Services. A natural pilot took place in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd and the rise of the BLM movement, which led to the creation of a trauma-informed support group for black and ethnic minority students who had been affected. A similar offer was made to the Indian Society in response to the public health crisis caused by the Covid pandemic. Both of these pilots were well received by students.

Since 2022, two hundred staff members have attended a Trauma Informed Practice Training workshop aimed at embedding this approach into their everyday practice. In December 2023, 12 key staff members (including representatives from Human Resources staff wellbeing team) attended a Pilot Train the Trainer session to enable the further development and cascading of this training.

Impact

- Following training staff have reported a significant increase in their understanding of what a trauma informed approach is, and how to use this in their roles compared to before the training, and this is sustained two months after the training.
- Staff report they consider more the past experiences of people they are interacting with, and how their demeanour or behaviour may be influenced by experience of trauma.

- Staff have considered the impact of environment and communication in work environments and identified key changes and improvements within their own teams or departments that can be implemented such as privacy and wording of emails.

Future plans

- Take a top-down approach to roll the training further into faculties and non-student facing roles.
- Offer ongoing support and development to Trauma Informed Trainers group
- Continue to evaluate sessions delivered by new trainers and the impact the training is having on how staff approach their work
- Recruitment of more Trauma Informed Practice Champions or Trainers
- Ongoing liaison and discussion with HR regarding how Trauma informed practice will be embedded through training and policy documents more broadly.