
Overview of ‘Engaging Young Men’ Project – Follow-Up to Recommendations made in the Young Men and Suicide Project Report

Background

Between March 2011 and October 2012, the Men’s Health Forum in Ireland (MHFI) coordinated an all-island action learning project which involved a broad range of stakeholders including the Health Service Executive (HSE), the National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP), the Public Health Agency (PHA) and the Institute of Public Health in Ireland (IPH). This initiative sought to identify a range of possible means to promote positive mental health among young men on the island of Ireland and to assess the efficacy of these approaches. There were four key objectives to this project:

1. Review existing mental health promotion and suicide prevention services and programmes (both national and international), in order to identify principles of effective practice when encouraging positive mental health among young men.
2. Coordinate a stakeholder engagement process to share best practice - both online and face-to-face.
3. Develop and pilot two practical initiatives which utilise the information generated.
4. Report on the learning gleaned, and offer recommendations to inform future programmes / campaigns which focus on the mental health of young men in Ireland.

The final report (www.mhfi.org/ymspfullreport.pdf) on this project was launched in January 2013 by Minister Kathleen Lynch in the Republic of Ireland and Minister Edwin Poots in Northern Ireland. This document included a ‘Conclusion and Recommendations’ section which made twelve key proposals:

- R.1 Develop and promote positive models of mental health that are specifically targeted at boys and young men.
- R.2 Adopt a whole of government, joined-up approach, to young men’s mental health.
- R.3 Plan services and programmes for and with young men, and work on developing trust and safety through the creation of non-threatening and male-friendly environments.
- R.4 Target early intervention and the provision of appropriate services at those most at risk.
- R.5 Expand interventions that tackle alcohol and substance misuse in young men.
- R.6 Challenge traditional masculine ideology that is associated with impaired help seeking behaviour in young men.
- R.7 Incorporate role models and marketing into suicide prevention work with young men.
- R.8 Have a more explicit focus on peer support and mentoring in suicide prevention work with young men.
- R.9 Promote and encourage the use of safe and responsible online resources in mental health promotion and suicide prevention work with young men.
- R.10 Develop a one day training programme for all frontline staff on how to effectively engage with young men.

- R.11 Ensure that research underpins all on-going and future work in the area of suicide prevention with young men.
- R.12 Identify and nominate a body to coordinate and oversee future developments in mental health promotion work with young men.

The Need to Follow-up these Recommendations

In the Foreword to 'A Report on the all-Ireland Young Men and Suicide Project' (January 2013), Ministers for Health, James Reilly and Edwin Poots, comment:

“Addressing suicide on the island of Ireland is a challenging task. The scale and breadth of factors that are associated with suicide and attempted suicide - and the complex interplay of these factors - underscores the magnitude of the challenge associated with suicide prevention.

Suicide is now a major cause of death among young males in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and trends are worrying and a cause for real concern. The economic downturn, and rising levels of unemployment, demand increased focus on prevention efforts. The loss of life for young people, so many of whom are male, is devastating to family and friends, and impinges on concepts and notions of community, solidarity and social cohesion”.

This report also highlights a number of other key issues in this area:

- Although the rate of male suicide in Ireland is relatively low within the overall European Union (EU) context, the rate among young males is amongst the highest in the EU.
- While rates of attempted suicide and deliberate self harm (DSH) have, overall, been traditionally higher among females, rates of DSH are now higher among some age bands of younger males than younger females.
- The factors most consistently associated with the rise in young male suicide are income inequality, family relationship difficulties, peer relationship problems, school failure, low self esteem and violence. Gender roles and identity have also been implicated in increased suicide risk amongst young men. Despite this, many service providers admit to only having a limited understanding of the world of young men.
- Whilst the problems that sometimes burden young men might be regarded by others as trivial, they may be perceived and experienced as major problems for young men themselves.
- Young men need to be supported to see emotional expression as a skill that improves with practice, and need to build an emotional vocabulary.
- Early intervention has been shown to be particularly effective.
- There are ten key principles for effectively engaging with young men, and a number of tested models for doing so. Information on these approaches needs to be disseminated more widely.
- There are no quick-fix solutions to tackling the causes and risk factors that underpin the statistics on suicide in young men. There is no simple single solution.
- Young men are interested in their own mental well-being, but often feel that they are not offered the right things in the right ways.

Focus of ‘Engaging Young Men’

MHFI is keen to develop further initiatives which can address the recommendations in the Young Men and Suicide Project (YMSP) report. The Forum reviewed and discussed these proposals with key stakeholders, including NOSP, and concluded that Recommendation 10 (i.e. develop a one day training programme for all frontline staff on how to effectively engage with young men) presents an immediate opportunity to make a significant contribution to this area of work. Subsequently, MHFI sought and received funding from NOSP (initially for one year) to implement Recommendation 10.

MHFI also acknowledges that developing such a programme could help to partially address / influence some of the other report recommendations. For example, the need to:

- Promote positive models of mental health that are specifically targeted at boys and young men (R1).
- Have a joined-up approach to young men’s mental health (R2).
- Plan services and programmes for and with young men, and work on developing trust and safety through the creation of non-threatening and male-friendly environments (R3).
- Target early intervention and the provision of appropriate services at those most at risk (R4).
- Challenge traditional masculine ideology (R6).
- Have a more explicit focus on peer support and mentoring (R8).
- Ensure that research underpins all on-going and future work (R11).

Aim of Project

The core aim of this project is to develop a training package which will increase the capacity of service providers and practitioners in this field to effectively engage with young men in relation to programmes which promote mental health and well-being.

Objectives

To meet this aim, four objectives will be pursued:

(i) Conduct a Mapping Exercise

To avoid duplicating existing programmes / projects, MHFI will oversee a mapping exercise of current provision at the outset. This will target eight discrete work areas, and information will be gathered via Focus Groups. This process will:

- Create an inventory of present / planned programmes.
- Identify gaps across the country.
- Highlight the training needs of a wide variety of organisations.
- Seek feedback on how the training might be delivered most appropriately.
- Shape the focus, content and structure of the training package.

(ii) Apply a ‘Gender Lens’ to Organisations

One tangible product from the development of the training package will be an ‘audit tool’ to help organisations to assess how male-friendly they currently are. This will help them to establish their baseline situation and to identify areas which need further reflection and/or change. This is in line with *‘Equal but Different: A framework for integrating gender equality in HSE policy, planning and service delivery’*.

This initiative will also develop a self-assessment 'quality mark' classification system. This will offer service providers a further tool for self-reflection, which will help them to monitor their progress towards becoming more young male-friendly in a practical and tangible way. It will identify a set of structures, systems, protocols and actions which range from 'just a little male-friendly' to 'extremely male-friendly', and will use a Gold, Silver and Bronze award system. While for internal use only, this will help to provide a concrete framework for organisations to measure their progress over time.

(iii) Create a Dedicated Course Unit within the 'Engage' Training Programme

To be most effective, this working with young men training will not rely solely on delivery by MHFI personnel. Therefore, the training package will be designed so that it can become an additional Course Unit within 'Engage' - the National Men's Health Training Programme, which was commissioned and supported by the Health Service Executive's Health Promotion Department.

MHFI has, to date, played a key role in the development of the 'Engage' programme by supporting the production of resources, recruiting trainers, and hosting the online discussion forum / information portal for trainers.

Developing the working with young men's training as a Unit within 'Engage' has three benefits. It will:

- Ensure that there are a broad range of trainers throughout Ireland who are willing and qualified to deliver it.
- Adhere to the rigorous standards of development that have characterised the production of the current 'Engage' materials.
- Involve the creation of a package of materials which can be used in their entirety or as part of shorter one-off sessions with a specific focus. This flexibility is critical when seeking to accommodate the needs of trainees.

This Unit will be offered to qualified 'Engage' Trainers as a top-up module. It is anticipated that approximately 25 Trainers will participate in it. They will then be able to deliver either the whole package, or elements of it, as part of their ongoing 'Engage' commitment.

In addition, five workshops will be held for a broader range of practitioners who are working with / seeking to work with young men throughout Ireland. These sessions will involve up to twenty trainees each, and will be held in:

- Dublin (x 2)
- Midlands area
- Southern area
- Western area

Subsequently, up to 100 practitioners - who are not connected to the 'Engage' programme - will also learn skills / models of effective practice on how to engage and work with young men on issues related to their health and well-being.

The training materials generated in this Unit will be made available in a range of formats e.g. PowerPoints, handouts and, if possible, as short online videos.

(iv) Act as an Irish Portal for Information on Young Men and Mental Health

While there are many organisations in Ireland that work with young people or young men or on mental health issues, there is no group which has specific responsibility for acting as the 'clearing house' for information, research, signposting, advice and training in relation to young men and mental health.

MHFI will undertake this function during both the funded period and, as far as possible, after the funding has ended. This will ensure a national reference point for this field of work. This assistance will be offered via email, telephone and the MHFI website.

Management and Governance

The project will be overseen by an Advisory Group comprised of representatives from NOSP, HSE Health Promotion Department, IPH and MHFI. If appropriate, other organisations, with specific experience in this field of work, may be invited to contribute. This is the same model of governance which was used during the Young Men and Suicide Project.

Developments will be managed by the Director of Operations within MHFI. This person's work will be supervised by the Forum's Board of Trustees - which is comprised of experienced men's health practitioners, senior academics, health service providers and health policy advisors.

Timescale

It is envisaged that this will be a three year programme. However, at present, funding has only been secured for Year 1. Future funding is dependent upon both meeting targets and the availability of resources.

Projected Outputs

This initiative will:

- Collate and document the experience of service providers and stakeholders from eight fields of interest.
- Develop tools to help organisations to measure how young male-friendly they currently are.
- Provide an evidence-based model of work which offers a clear rationale for why engaging young men is needed, and practice guidelines for doing so.
- Create a network of trainers in this field who can cascade their knowledge to others.
- Establish an information portal on young men and mental health.