

Project Details	
Project Code	MRCNMH26Ba Paskell
Title	The Experience and Impact of Trauma and Moral Injury in Staff Working to Prevent Community Violence
Research Theme	NMH
Project Type	Dry lab
Summary	Third-sector staff working to prevent or support those affected by community violence are regularly exposed to high-levels of trauma, limited funding, and heavy workloads. Many hold significant responsibility with limited training, support or clinical supervision. Rates of staff turnover are high. There is an evidence gap about the extent of trauma and moral injury in this population and how staff can be better supported. This project will explore the experiences of staff in this sector and codesign a tailored package of support. This work will improve staff wellbeing, reduce turnover, and improve outcomes for staff and the communities they serve.
Description	<p>Potentially morally injurious events (PMIEs) are experiences that violate a person's moral code, leading to intense feelings of guilt, shame, betrayal, or anger. For staff working in roles aimed at preventing or supporting those affected by community violence —such as third sector youth workers, social workers, or outreach staff (e.g. Safer London, Red Thread) —examples of PMIEs include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feeling responsible when someone they support becomes involved in violence, is harmed, or dies, despite their efforts; Observing discriminatory treatment toward service users but feeling powerless to intervene; Feeling betrayed by leadership that fails to protect staff from violence or unsafe conditions; <p>These experiences can cause 'moral injury' and can lead to the development of mental health problems including depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Reduced investment in public services means that there are widespread issues of understaffing, long waitlists, and high workloads, which increase the risk of traumatic and challenging situations for staff and the community they serve.</p> <p>Staff experiencing psychological ill-health are less able to support individuals at risk of violence, criminalisation and exploitation. Providing better support to staff could improve their own wellbeing and allow them to carry out their roles more effectively, helping service users by improving interactions and the care provided. No targeted, tailored support for trauma and MI-related distress is currently available for staff working to prevent community violence.</p> <p>Study aims and research questions: This mixed-method studentship will be the first to explore the experiences and impact of trauma exposure and moral injury for staff working to prevent and support those affected by community violence. The student will address the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What kinds of occupational trauma and PMIEs are experienced by staff and how frequently?

	<p>2. What is the relationship between exposure to traumatic events, PMIEs and staff wellbeing?</p> <p>3. What are staff's perceptions of (need for) formal and informal support following exposure to trauma and PMIEs?</p> <p>4. Is it feasible to codesign a programme of support with staff to improve wellbeing that is considered acceptable in this uniquely challenging setting?</p> <p>Project plan: To address these questions, this project will use three stages.</p> <p>Stage 1 will include a cross-sectional survey which will map prevalence and associated burden of trauma facing staff working in the community violence field. This will include detailing the situations that can lead to moral injury, the impact on staff wellbeing, and open-ended questions to explore what staff think about (in)formal support before or after these situations.</p> <p>Stage 2 will utilise qualitative interviews and explore the lived experiences of staff working to prevent community violence (target n=25). The student will conduct one-to-one interviews and codesign a programme to better support staff wellbeing. The design of the programme will depend on what staff believe will be most helpful but could involve better training so that staff are more prepared for challenging situations, and/or it could involve sessions after an event has occurred to help staff deal with their experiences.</p> <p>In Stage 3, once the programme is drafted, the student will share it with stakeholders for feedback, including community and gang violence prevention/support staff, those working in organisational management/governance, social workers, and occupational health and clinicians who support staff to ensure it will be well tolerated, feasible to deliver and implement.</p> <p>The student will work closely with leading experts in post-trauma mental health, including Dr Williamson (University of Bath), Prof Moran (University of Bristol), Dr Paskell (University of Bath), and Dr Berger (St George's). They will also collaborate with specialists in community violence. In addition, the student will gain experience in co-designing interventions for complex health challenges, guided by Dr Williamson (University of Bath) and Prof Murphy (King's College London). With the guidance of an experienced and multidisciplinary team, the student will have the opportunity to develop and apply a range of analytical skills in a dynamic research setting.</p> <p>As the first study to explore how staff in community violence prevention/support experience and respond to trauma and PMIEs, this studentship will generate insights to inform best practice in occupational health. A key outcome will be the codesign of a targeted support programme, with early evidence of acceptability and feasibility of delivery. If successful, the programme could help shape national treatment options via the NHS and occupational health services. The student's codesign process will also inform future interventions in other complex, low-resource settings. This programme may ultimately support a broader range of occupational groups exposed to trauma and PMIEs.</p>
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	Knowledge transfer: In the final three months, the student will work with staff, clinicians, and psychotraumatology experts to create a short, animated video sharing key findings. This will be shared across social media and partner networks (e.g. Society of Occupational Medicine) to increase public understanding of occupational trauma and moral injury, improve engagement with best practice and help-seeking.
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