

Digital Application (Sentinel) for Trauma Management with First Responders:

Developing an Evidence-based & Co-created Intervention

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INTRODUCTION

First responders are at high risk of being exposed to traumatic events in their occupational roles. Responding to critical incidents often involves exposure to life-threatening circumstances, dealing with fatalities as well as encountering highly stressful situations that may trigger traumatic responses. These experiences can lead to poor mental health outcomes including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and suicidality. Little research has explored the perspectives of first responders in dealing with occupational trauma(s) and how best to meet their mental health needs using a digital application.

DESIGN

An exploratory, mixed methods research design based on semi-structured, in-depth interviews (n = 50) with first responders and an online cross-sectional survey (n = 600+) was adopted. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and analysed using an inductive thematic approach. Survey data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

RESULTS

The themes developed from the interviews were:

- 1 Difficulties accessing timely support and engaging with mental health services
- 2 Need to understand the impact of trauma on self and others
- 3 Stigma, shame and self-blame as barriers to help-seeking
- 4 Importance of credible, specific and accessible interventions

The quantitative survey data indicated a high prevalence of exposure to occupational trauma (94%) and perceived acceptability (69%) of a digital intervention to meet their needs.

CONCLUSIONS

The implications of these findings at the service provider and organisational level emphasise the importance of implementing a strengths-based, non-pathologising and de-shaming approach to trauma in the workplace as experienced by first responders. Emphasis is placed on the importance of overcoming barriers to accessing mental health support. The acceptability of digital based interventions as a means of providing flexible and accessible help will inform the development of a co-created digital application (Sentinel) which seeks to meet first responders' mental health needs.

“

It's about feeling safe in your mindset, and I think lots of things can upset that as a paramedic. So things that you see at work, dealing with other people's traumas, could upset your psychological safety. It could damage it just like you know, I wear a hard hat so that I don't get hit in the head. But I've got no PPE to protect my mind. Nothing (pause) and that's that leaves you in a bit of a vulnerable position - John, paramedic

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