



Pioneer Scheme Half-day Learning programme

Wednesday 26th June 2019

KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

Self-harm among sexual abuse survivors

With Katie Shelvin and three Peer Educators from SAY Women Project

1) What were the key learning points from this session?

- SAY Women = a voluntary organisation for women aged 16-25 who have previously experienced sexual abuse/rape/sexual assault and are homeless/threatened with homelessness.
- 1:1 support (practical and emotional) offered at Bell Street.
- Semi-supportive accommodation also available.
- Groups available including self-harm conversation group.
- Women can be referred by their GP or self-refer and can be seen for as long as needed, as long as they are initially referred within the age range.
- There are many different types of self-harm and many different reasons/intentions for self-harming – from being a release of emotion/perceived dirtiness/germs, to giving someone who otherwise feels ‘numb’ a sensation. It is different for each person who harms and can sometimes even be different for each act of self –harm.
- For some people, self-harm is a helpful coping tool and in these cases it may be more appropriate to aim for harm reduction rather than cessation of self-harm.
- Different people develop different coping strategies – for example squeezing ice-cubes coloured with red food dye to mimic blood, writing negative words on eggs and then throwing them/smashing them, creating self-care boxes.
- It is important to be mindful of the words we use when speaking with patients – for example do not use the term ‘sex’ when in fact a patient is talking about rape.

2) What changes to practice might you consider?

- We are now more likely to use this service or direct our patients to use the service (many of us had not heard of SAY Women before this session).
- Will be more mindful during consultations with victims of sexual abuse/assault, in terms of words used, being mindful of explaining what we are doing in an examination and why, asking permission before having physical contact with a patient etc.
- More likely to ask about what a patient is happy for us to write in the notes/discuss documentation of sensitive issues in notes.
- Will be able to suggest some of the coping strategies listed above to patients who self-harm.

3) Any useful resources to share?

- Samaritans – www.samaritans.org. Tel 116 123.
- Rape Crisis - <https://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk>
- Amina Muslim Women's Resource Centre - <https://mwrc.org.uk/>
- Breathing Space - <https://breathingspace.scot/>, 0800 83 85 87