



Leicestershire GATE
Gypsy & Traveller Equalities

Raising awareness of mental health in GRT communities
By Jackie Duffy

What is Mental Health

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood.

What is Mental Health

- ▶ Over the course of your life, if you experience mental health problems, your thinking, mood, and behavior could be affected. Many factors contribute to mental health problems, including:
- ▶ Biological factors, such as genes or brain chemistry
- ▶ Life experiences, such as trauma or abuse
- ▶ Family history of mental health problems

Early warning signs

- ▶ Eating or sleeping too much or too little
- ▶ Pulling away from people and usual activities
- ▶ Having low or no energy
- ▶ Feeling numb or like nothing matters
- ▶ Having unexplained aches and pains
- ▶ Feeling helpless or hopeless
- ▶ Smoking, drinking, or using drugs more than normal

Early warning signs cont....

- ▶ Feeling unusually confused, forgetful, on edge, angry, upset, worried, or scared
- ▶ Yelling or fighting with family and friends
- ▶ Experiencing severe mood swings that cause problems in relationships
- ▶ Having persistent thoughts and memories you can't get out of your head
- ▶ Hearing voices or believing things that are not true
- ▶ Thinking of harming yourself or others
- ▶ Inability to perform daily tasks like taking care of your kids or getting to work or school

Factors on GRT mental health

- ▶ Social exclusion
- ▶ Throw away racism and discrimination
- ▶ Gender roles
- ▶ Financial pressures
- ▶ Identity and family
- ▶ Domestic abuse
- ▶ Poor access to appropriate support and diagnosis

Key learning points for practitioners

- ▶ Ensure that you are monitoring the ethnicity of service users.
- ▶ Work with the whole family
- ▶ Use low literacy materials - easy to understand language
- ▶ Trust is key - try to work with established GRT organisations
- ▶ Be patient - this is likely to be very new
- ▶ Be flexible/think outside the box

Recommendations/Good Practice

- ▶ Be discrete - gossip is a real and present fear, given the close links between families confidentiality is crucial.
- ▶ Remember the importance of traditional gender roles
- ▶ There is a lack of power, and as a result, assertiveness, of women in the communities.
- ▶ Try to ensure that there is regular support for young people - this will be a totally different service than that needed by adults.
- ▶ Get support from specialist organisations such as MIND
- ▶ Look beyond the obvious - anti depressants do not solve the problem - they only mask it.
- ▶ Try to be consistent, same staff, regular times and places etc.
- ▶ Remember that mental health may still have a negative stigma attached to it