

Methods: We designed a supplementary half-day workshop as a continuation to the half day MHFA awareness course. Simulation-based activities focused on communication frameworks such as MHFA's ALGEE (Assess, Listen, Give support, Encourage professional support, Encourage other support) [2] and STEPS (Start, Time, Empathy, Provision of support, Sense check) [3]. The development group concluded that focussing on the most common presentations first aiders might encounter, would have optimal benefit to society. Scenarios covered situations within the community when first aiders might be faced with: people with depression, acute anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Results: The incorporation of simulations after MHFA awareness training significantly enhanced participant engagement and skill acquisition. Data from groups before the simulation addition and from groups after the simulation addition, revealed a marked difference in self-assessed levels of confidence in applying ALGEE and STEPS frameworks. Post-workshop evaluations indicated increased understanding of mental health issues and improved readiness to provide support in real-life scenarios. Furthermore, participants expressed appreciation for the immersive learning experience and its applicability to diverse settings.

Discussion: Our findings underscore the effectiveness of simulation-based learning in augmenting MHFA training outcomes. By providing opportunities for practical application of communication frameworks and exposure to real-world scenarios, simulations facilitated deeper learning and skills practice among attendees. This transformative approach not only enhances the quality of MHFA training but also promotes safety, and has the potential to improve mental health outcomes. Our simulation-based approach to MHFA training offers a replicable and pertinent strategy for organisations seeking to promote mental health literacy. Co-designed with lay attendees, this innovative training methodology ensures that MHFA training remains dynamic, engaging, and impactful in addressing the evolving needs of communities.

Ethics statement: Authors confirm that all relevant ethical standards for research conduct and dissemination have been met. The submitting author confirms that relevant ethical approval was granted, if applicable.

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IN PRACTICE

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ENHANCING MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID (MHFA) TRAINING THROUGH SIMULATION-BASED LEARNING: A TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH

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Introduction: The Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) awareness course typically involves PowerPoint presentations with limited practical skills practice, leaving attendees with insufficient hands-on experience. This gap was identified by recipients of MHFA training, who were lay individuals. Working in collaboration, we aimed to transform the traditional MHFA training by incorporating simulation-based learning, providing attendees with immersive experiences and practical skill development. Considering the simulation-based 'I' taxonomy [1], this initiative falls into improvement, (making something that already exists better), involvement (inviting excluded groups to generate new perspectives), and influence (potential to encourage attendees to actualise their skills).