

JOHS SHORT REPORT: INNOVATIONS

Beyond bystandering: a novel simulation methodology addressing interprofessional microaggressions

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Introduction

It's widely recognized that there is a growing need for solutions to address microaggressions (Figure 1) and discrimination in healthcare environments, with approaches being developed at both undergraduate [1] and postgraduate [2] levels. Active Bystander Training (ABT) has been used successfully across military, higher education and government workplaces but despite this remains an under-utilized resource for tackling workplace microaggressions and discrimination in the NHS [3].

Whilst some approaches to training remain in the realms of didactic sessions and facilitated discussions [1], we are starting to see simulation-based medical education (SBME) incorporate microaggressions into clinical scenarios [2]. This is a positive step forward; however, additional consideration must be given to the psychological safety of participants and faculty when scenario content may prove emotionally distressing or harmful. Successful reports of incorporating microaggressions into blinded immersive simulation scenarios are caveated with reports of faculty feeling emotionally uncomfortable [4], and mitigating the psychological threat to simulated patients from diverse communities is a challenge [5].

We believe that incorporating incidents of microaggressions into blinded immersive simulation carries a risk to psychological safety to all involved, and particularly so to participants (including faculty and actors) with protected characteristics.

Innovation

Locally, common feedback from staff following the existing ABT was that confidence to actively intervene in situations was affected by difficulties in word-choice and phraseology preferences. We have, therefore, designed an innovative 'Beyond Bystander' workshop to follow on from knowledge-based training to enable open exploration and, crucially, rehearsal of bystander interventions in a psychologically safe environment.

Our approach uses a helical structure, stacking simulation pedagogies with each phase building on the previous (Figure 2) alongside consistent reference to Active Bystander techniques. Trained simulation facilitators – themselves with protected characteristics and lived experiences – guide participants through the workshop.

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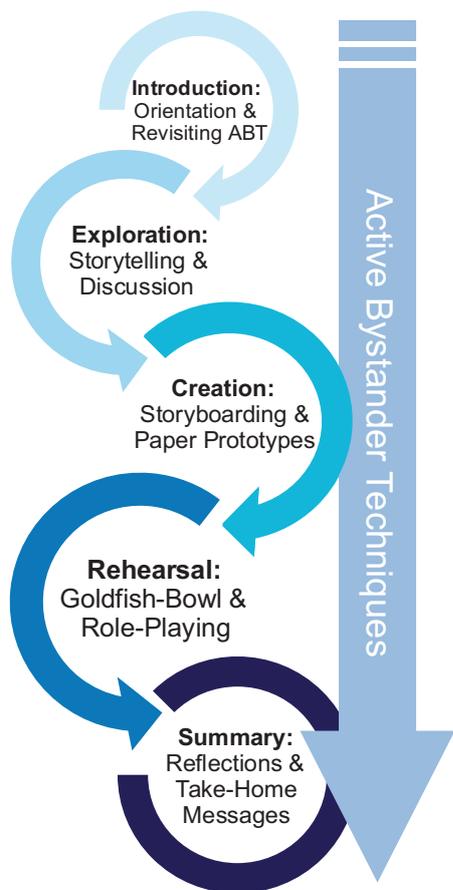
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Figure 1: Microaggression definition.

Microaggressions are...

Slights, snubs, or insults which are hostile or derogatory in nature and directed towards people based on their protection characteristics or minoritized group status. They can be verbal, non-verbal, or environmental, and may or may not be intentional.

Figure 2: The Beyond Bystander Workshop helical design.



The ‘Beyond Bystander’ Workshop

Introduction and orientation

We give an overview of ABT and introduce the workshop content. Importantly, we have incorporated a ‘distress protocol’ into our design which guides facilitators to best support participants, and this is highlighted in the orientation alongside focused ‘ground rules’.

Storytelling and discussion

Using narrative pedagogy, participants are invited to share experiences of either witnessing microaggressions in the workplace or opportunities for bystander interventions (successful or otherwise) to encourage discussion and reflection in the context of active bystander techniques.

Storyboarding and paper prototypes

The workshop then builds from storytelling to storyboarding, using creation to explore individual word-choice and phraseology preferences. Groups are tasked with designing and scripting simulation scenario vignettes involving examples of microaggressions across different themes. By choosing the microaggression examples themselves, often drawn from the storytelling phase, participants can safely explore themes and approaches without artefact or surprise.

Rehearsal and role-play

The final stage builds to use a hybrid role-play simulation adopting a Goldfish-bowl technique to simulate witnessing microaggressions in the clinical environment. Pre-recorded scenario vignettes, each displaying an occurrence of a microaggression, are played to groups utilizing the same scenario format as used in the storyboarding phase. The vignettes each include a character in a position of observer who has the potential to become an active bystander. The vignettes cut off when intervention may be indicated, and the groups are prompted to assume the characters and role-play interactions to explore their individual word-choice and phraseology preferences. The content of each vignette is pre-briefed, and facilitators support each group to monitor psychological safety.

Take-home messages

We conclude the Beyond Bystander workshop with a summary of discoveries and take-home messages, as well as highlighting keywords and phrases shared by the role-playing groups that were particularly helpful.

Evaluation and Outcomes

The workshop was evaluated using a combination of pre- and post-session feedback questionnaires and a group interview immediately after the workshop was completed. The questionnaire gathered data on participants’ knowledge of bystander interventions and their confidence in both knowing what to say and actively intervening if they witnessed a microaggression. The post-session questionnaire and group interview also specifically asked about psychological safety, as well as session mechanics and structure.

Four participants attended a proof-of-concept workshop. Evaluation data demonstrated that the workshop increased participants’ knowledge of bystander interventions and their confidence in the words they would use when acting as a bystander. All participants strongly agreed that their psychological safety was protected during the workshop, and they felt comfortable sharing their experiences of microaggressions.

What’s next?

Based on our preliminary feedback, we aim to study our workshop design more comprehensively with larger participant groups from a diverse set of professional roles. Additional longitudinal research will be conducted to explore participants’ experiences of utilising bystander techniques and reflections on whether the workshop encouraged or facilitated these.

We believe our helical design of stacking simulation pedagogy to preserve psychological safety when addressing difficult subjects is transferrable to similar themes. We already plan to adopt the design to address incivility interventions, and there are potential uses for exploring male allyship as part of an approach to tackling sexual misconduct in the workplace.

Acknowledgements

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Declarations

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Ethics approval and consent to participate

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Competing interests

None declared.

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