

Tip: Use graphics to set the tone of the speech.

# Envisioning MTU as a Trauma-Sensitive University

# Background to Study

- There are currently no trauma-sensitive universities in Ireland
- Cork is currently working to become Ireland's first trauma-sensitive city

# Definition of Trauma

- No set definition
- Derives from the Greek language meaning 'wound'
- SAMHSA (2014) 'trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.'

# Trauma

- One experience or multiple experiences that result in a subjective threat either experienced or witnessed or heard
- The brain adopts coping mechanisms to survive e.g. fight/flight/freeze/distrust
- Can cause a person to perceive a threat that isn't there due to triggers e.g. waiting, sound, smell
- Constant triggering linked to high blood pressure and heart disease

# Rationale for Study

- As trauma is prevalent in society, there are many people in universities that would have experienced trauma and may still be experiencing traumatic events while attending university.
- 1 in 4 women who have been in a relationship have experienced domestic violence in Ireland (Women's Aid, 2021)
- 29% of females, 10% of males and 28% nonbinary experienced sexual assault during their time in college (Union of Students Ireland, 2020).

# Rationale for Study

- Trauma informed care (TIC) will ensure services on campus are accessible to all.
- TIC approach is a framework universally aimed at understanding, identifying, and addressing trauma in organisations by making changes to practices, policies and procedures

# Research Objective and Research Question

- The study focuses on MTU as a single case study.
- Main research question: What steps, policies, staff training, and funding is required to make MTU trauma-sensitive?
- Main objective: to investigate what it means to be a trauma-sensitive university and what steps need to be taken for MTU to achieve this.

# Research Methods

- Qualitative research: 20 in-depth, semi-structured interviews were utilised.
- This sample was chosen due to their experience working within MTU.
- To ensure diversity within the study, the sample included members of the students' union and staff from various divisions of MTU with diverse backgrounds and expertise.
- Participants were selected across 6 of MTU's campuses and are in various tiers of hierarchy in the university.



# Research Findings

- All except one participant stated they have encountered students experiencing trauma, however only three participants have had specific trauma training.
- *I would have had a couple of people that come to college having made a failed suicide attempt that day or I might have somebody that would sit down saying that they had considered trying to do something to end their lives and giving flat reasons why, there was no doubt in my head but that they meant exactly what they said (Participant N).*
- *For instance, we have had a few students who have died tragically over the last year especially, since we have come back from covid. We had a young man who died tragically. We were all devastated here about that. The students were inconsolable (Participant D).*

# Research Findings

- Participants believed staff strive to be trauma-sensitive but struggle due to lack of resources
- *You need to resource it properly and quite often it's not resourced properly, and that's a big challenge we're up against, and I think we will always have caring staff, I think generally people care, but it's about maintaining that narrative and promoting that (Participant G).*
- *I believe as an organization as a whole, people are trauma sensitive, but we may not have enough resources to manage trauma. (Participant A).*

# Research Findings

- Participants discussed the importance of embedding a trauma-sensitive approach into MTU's policies and procedures so it will not be a tick the box exercise.
- *It's not just 'oh we do this to get the flag' or whatever it is, the trophy or the plaque on the wall. It's about how do we live and breathe it once it's finished, and to have that it needs to be a way of working and it needs to be almost a mindset to actually have it embedded in everything then, across all policy and everything that we're doing should have that approach to it really, that's our bench-mark (Participant J).*

# Recommendations for Practice

- Trauma training for all staff
- Need for evaluation and measurement of TIC practices in MTU
- Framework needs to be implemented and resources must be provided to ensure trauma-sensitive approach is embedded in MTU policies and procedures

# Conclusions

- All participants had an understanding of trauma and its impact on students
- Participants were passionate about MTU pledging to be trauma-sensitive however they believed they need more resources for it to be done effectively
- All participants except one have dealt with students in distress in their role however most have not received trauma training