

Understanding the barriers to accessing mental health and wellbeing support for boys in Rotherham

A service evaluation research project

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December 2025



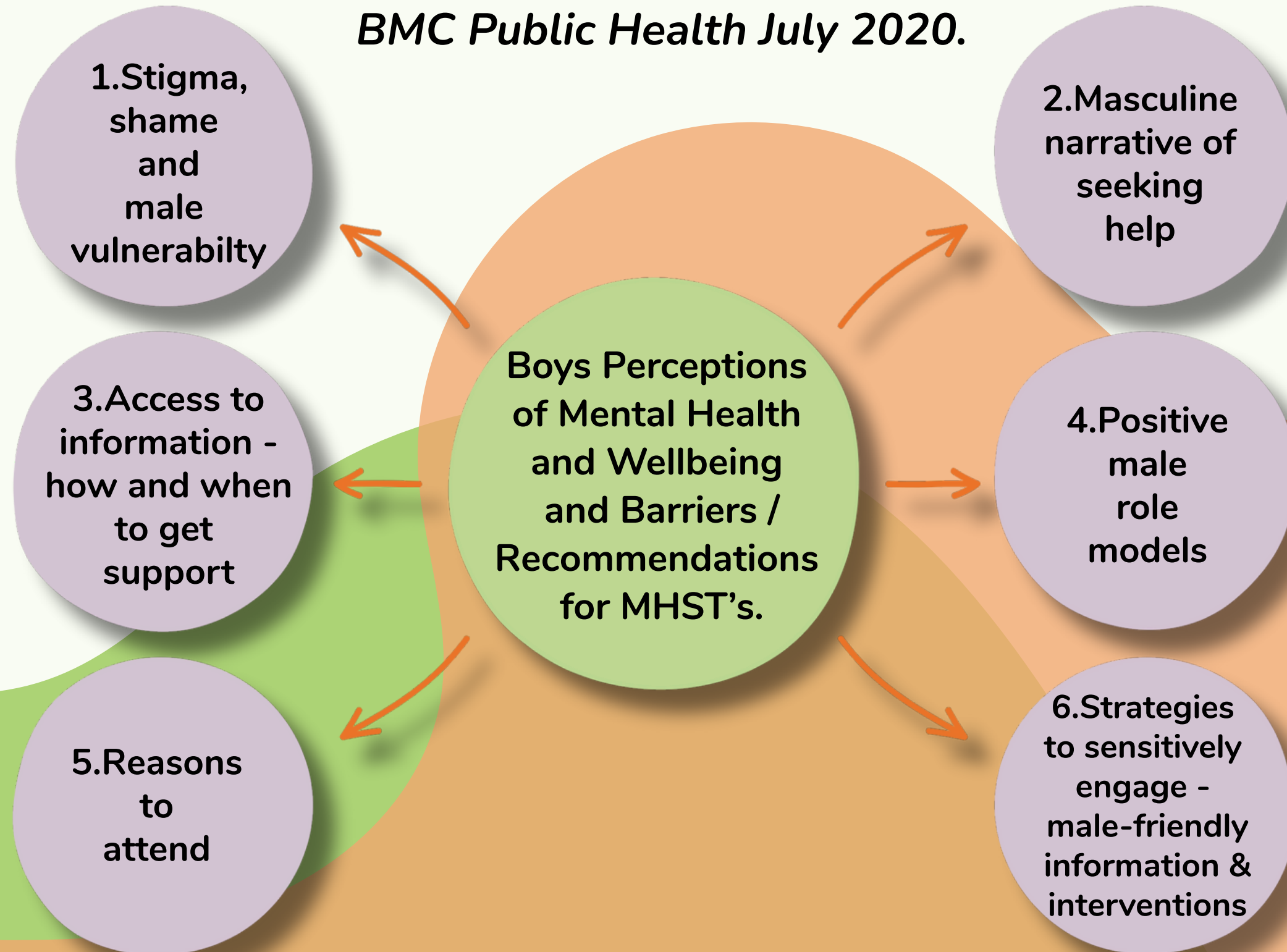
Brief Overview of Literature

Engaging teenage boys in mental health support.

Kings College London- Dr June Brown & Dr Stephen Lisk. December 2021.

Engaging male students with mental health support: a qualitative focus group study.

BMC Public Health July 2020.



With Me In Mind Focus Groups

Why?

Referral data showed lower referrals for males in to the service. There was a decrease in numbers compared to referrals for females across both primary and secondary settings but this was more significant in Year 6 and Year 9.

We wanted to explore what some of the barriers may be to boys accessing mental health support and what may support them to come forward in the future.

Who?

We carried out focus groups with 120 Year 6 (age 10 to 11) and Year 9 (age 13 to 14) students who identified as male.

Where?

The focus groups were carried out in 15 primary and secondary settings across Rotherham.

How?

8 questions were asked to each group using a semi-structured interview method.



Focus Group Questions

1. Who would you go to if you wanted to talk about your feelings, worries or problems?

'I wouldn't want to see a worker, I don't know them'

'Friends who have had the same experiences'

'With teachers it depends on trust and how friendly they are'

'Family members and friends because they know you a lot better and can help guide you through the problem'

'I like to speak to someone my own age'

'Someone I trust who won't laugh at me'

'The relationship is very important, people expect you to go in to a room and just start talking about your feelings with someone you don't even know'

'Would speak to family, other boys, mum and dad, someone I feel comfortable with. Relationships are important. I would not speak to a teacher but wouldn't mind a worker if they were trained'

'Nobody, its just awkward'

'Andrew Tate gives messages like, if you're depressed, just work harder, I don't think that's right'

'Write it in a diary or talk to my pet'

'Mum's are more understanding than dad's about feelings'

'I wouldn't talk to teachers, worried about them sharing information'

'Parents know what is best for you, or an older brother or sister because they are still young but they wouldn't over react'

'Dogs are easy to talk to'

Themes

1. Who would you go to if you wanted to talk about your feelings, worries or problems?

Relationship

Trust, familiarity, comfort, time, experience, family and friends.

Negative Connotations

School, privacy, new people, judgement.

Alternative support

Pets, music, drawing, diaries, sport, don't always want answers or to talk.



2. What place would you feel most comfortable in if you were talking about your feelings?

'A private place where no one can hear'.

'Quiet space, confidential, don't want confrontation at home. Anywhere confidential really'. Happy for it be outside school or in a service's building'.

'Outside in the garden and sunshine'

'In the park'.

'Football pitch or a park, somewhere outside. Can talk side by side and not too close'.

'Through texting or on the phone, don't see reactions or eye contact'.

My bedroom, more comfortable'.

My bedroom coz it's my own space'

'Anywhere as long as it's with someone I trust. Needs to be quiet, comfortable, safe and away from people'.

'Outside, in a nice space, can be side by side then'.

'If it was in school it would have to be a soundproof room'.

'Sitting side by side, when we don't have direct eye contact'.

'Rather do it in person but walking side by side is better'.

'Somewhere really private with a quiet hallway. People can't disturb you and theres a sign on the door'. Somewhere comfy'.

'In a rage room so I can get my feelings out'.

'Somewhere I can leave if I need to'.

Themes

2. What place would you feel most comfortable in if you were talking about your feelings?

Privacy

Confidential, calm, quiet, safe.

Comfort

Familiarity, safety, not too formal, home, not feeling 'trapped'.

Alternative locations

Outdoors, not conventional methods of support. Side by side, less eye contact.



3. What might be some of the things that would stop you from talking about your mental health or asking for help?

'What other people think'

'Tension in the room'

'People being busy and I'm worried they are not interested'

'Masculine stereotypes like you can't be upset'

'If you don't know where to go for help'

'There's a lot of pressure from girls'

'A lot of films portray that boys should be strong and should be able to cope'

'Them laughing at me'

'What about if they don't like me anymore'

'Feeling embarrassed, uncomfortable, pressured'

'If it was too busy, not private or they asked a lot of questions'

'Worried about it getting passed on'

'Girls taking the mick out of you'

'Boys get called names for talking'

'Teachers are a lot nicer to girls when they get upset'

'Don't like sharing things that are too personal'

'What if it makes things worse'

Themes

3. What might be some of the things that would stop you from talking about your mental health or asking for help?

Stigma

Stereotypes, male role models, crying, judgement, media portrayal.

The unknown

Reaction, what happens next, sharing of info, understanding.

Gender differences

Inequality, girls reactions, views and treatment, bullying, differences in support/reaction.



4. Can you describe any of the thoughts or feelings you have when it comes to talking about your mental health?

'My brain tells me not to tell anyone'.

'I try to be doing something else at the same time'.

'Get hot and my stomach drops'.

'Are you gonna get judged'?

'Will I get in to trouble, will they laugh, will they make fun of me'?

'The more you do it the easier it gets'.

'It gives you anxiety'.

'Will they understand, will they help, will they take it the right way, will they tell anyone else'.

'Jelly and butterflies, my stomach feels weird'.

'Get over it - you're a boy'.

'Why is it different for girls'.

'If I get a tear in my eye, I just wipe my eyes and keep going'.

Themes

4. Can you describe any of the thoughts or feelings you have when it comes to talking about your mental health?

Physical Symptoms
Headaches, tension, stomach ache, nerves,

Distraction
Doing something else while talking so not too focused.



5. What are some other ways you might express yourself and get your feelings out?

'Shouting, punch my pillow'.

'Sport, football, helps me to forget everything'.

'Going on walks takes your mind off things'.

'Write stories, it relaxes me and I can write about whatever I want'.

'Scrumple paper up, draw, or set myself challenges'.

'Men like to do things with their hands, more interactive then just talking and questions'.

'Channel the stress in other ways, writing comedy'.

'Sports, football, walks, time off social media',

'Being outside with my friends'.

Sleeping helps me to be calm and forget everything'.

'I draw feelings and then rip it up at home'.

'Play my x-box, some games help to get anger out instead of doing it in real life'.

'I go out on my bike'.

'Just find something to focus on'.

'Kick a football, just smash it really hard'.

'Hug my dog'.

'Music helps when I want to be on my own'.

Themes

5. What are some other ways you might express yourself and get your feelings out?

Exercise

Sports, football, rugby, walking, boxing.

Creativity

Art, Music, Singing, Writing, Lego.

Games

Support and expression through gaming. Puzzles, self challenges.



6. What words come to mind when you think about boy's/men's mental health?



Medication Not masculine Embarrassing

Talking to my Dad Boring Wuss

Can't cry Grow a pair Stereotypes Happy

Judged Would be my worst subject ever

Get active Stay tough Suicide Shocking

Men commit suicide Boys struggle Anger

It doesn't matter Girls think boys should be tough

Stay off social media Depression

Boys take the mick How can I help

Themes

6. What words come to mind when you think about boy's/men's mental health?

Stigma

Male roles,
expressing
emotion.

Misunderstood/
Dismissed

Suicide/
Medication



7. What could be done to make mental health support easier for boys to access?

- 'We have to have our own type of support, Boys are different from girls, its a fact'.
- 'Would like more equality, boys get treated worse when it comes to mental health'.
- 'School had a girls health week, we would like one'.
- 'More time to get to know workers, not just straight in with work and talking'.
- 'Fidget toys in sessions'
- 'Bike rides, walks - so don't have to sit across from each other staring at each other'.
- 'Just boys group for anger and depression'.
- 'Interactive stuff'
- 'Not all boys like sports but a lot of boys do. Combine mental health and sport, it might not work for everyone but it would help a lot of boys so don't worry about stereotyping'.
- 'Small groups - I would choose a boys only group'.
- 'Get to know you as individuals'.
- 'Celebrity stories, role models'.
- 'Short mental health messages, we don't want to have to read a load of stuff'.
- 'Do sessions outside'.
- 'Activities, not just talking - play cards, a boardgame, draw, lego while we are having the session'.
- 'Ask us what we like, not just same session for everyone'.
- 'Comfy rooms, beanbags, nice lights'.

Themes

7. What could be done to make mental health support easier for boys to access?

Outdoors/
Sports

Different way of expression, fun, distraction, role models, space.

Alternative
sessions

Creativity, games interaction, not just talking, short messages, visual.

Boys only
groups

Tailored to boys needs and emotions. Safe space for expression.



8. Would the person you received support from effect how comfortable you felt to talk?

'Don't mind how old they are but maybe can relate a bit more if they are younger'

'Someone who has experience, as long as they listen it doesn't matter'.

'More relaxed clothes, dress chill, so it's not too serious'.

'Female teachers are harder on boys than male teachers'.

'Don't mind but sometimes it's easier to talk to a female'.

'Not bothered about the age, gender, ethnicity of the worker, just think it should be boys only groups'.

'Culture and religion doesn't really matter but maybe not a muslim like me'.

'I wouldn't mind but women sometimes understand more, I would probably talk less to a man'.

'If they are older they are more caring, like your Nannan, if they are younger then they could have gone through the same things, I don't mind'.

'Just a regular person who we can check in with and doesn't let us down'.

'Would their religion effect the type of advice they gave? Not sure, but I wouldn't want it to'.

'A male who had been through what I've been through'

'Just someone funny, respectful and knows about mental health'.

Themes

8. Would the person you received support from effect how comfortable you felt to talk?

Experience
Training, role,
service

Relationship
Humour, non
judgemental,
respectful

Relatability



**Other
key quotes:**

'I think there should be more for boys in mental health week and international men's day'

'We don't want to be better or more important than girls with our emotions, just treat equally'.

'We want more With Me In Mind stuff, more male ambassadors and maybe a therapy dog or cat'.

'Support from a service wouldn't be the first thing I'd think of. It's just their job so do they really care. I'd need to get to know them first'.

'Crying is a big no for me, its like 'hes not a man' and reputation is a big thing'.

'Teachers need to understand us better and look for changes'.

'If tears are in your eyes, don't let them out'.

'It's OK to let your emotions out but don't take them out on someone else'.

'Never seen my dad cry. I pick things up from my dad, My dad's a man, I have to be a man'.

'I might want to talk but doesn't mean I want loads of questions and answers, just want to get it off my chest'.

'Boys have to hold it in but bottling it up makes you more angry and depressed'.

'I like stuff like this, we should do more because we don't really get asked'.

University of Sheffield – A Collaborative Research Project

‘Boys don’t talk’ Developing an understanding of why referrals to a mental health service decrease for secondary-aged boys.

- Schools who work with the MH service and parents/carers of boys who attend these schools were recruited.
- Focus groups were conducted as they gave the greatest amount of information in a limited amount of time.
- We conducted 2 focus groups, 1 for school staff and 1 for parents/carers.
- The focus groups were run via google meet, transcribed and then analysed by the researchers to ensure accuracy.
- We recruited the parents/carers of boys who attended two different secondary schools

Relationships

Positive Connections
Negative Connections

Discourse

Language
Traditional masculine norms/stereotypes

Systems

Community
School
Family
Friends

