

An Evaluation of Mental Health First Aid Training in New York City

Mental illness affects an estimated one in five U.S. adults; however, estimates indicate that only half of U.S. adults with mental health illnesses seek treatment.¹ Anxiety and depression are the two most prevalent mental illnesses in the U.S.¹ [ThriveNYC](#), a New York City-wide initiative to promote Mental Health for all New Yorkers, expanded Mental Health First Aid (MHFA), aiming to train 250,000 New Yorkers to understand mental health and support neighbors, friends, and family affected by mental health conditions, such as depression, anxiety, or substance misuse. Frontline New York City employees in particular were encouraged to take MHFA training as they are likely to regularly interact with individuals experiencing mental illness. During an 8-hour training session, MHFA provides information, teaches skills, and encourages participants to share their knowledge and skills. Following training, we surveyed participants trained between 2015 and 2018 to determine whether they told others about the training, shared the knowledge gained from the training, felt confident in the skills they learned, and used the training to help themselves and others, as well as to determine how and where participants applied knowledge gained through MHFA.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a shared traumatic experience that has disrupted life in our city and communities. There is a continued need in NYC for widespread mental health education and support programs like MHFA.

Most participants told others about Mental Health First Aid

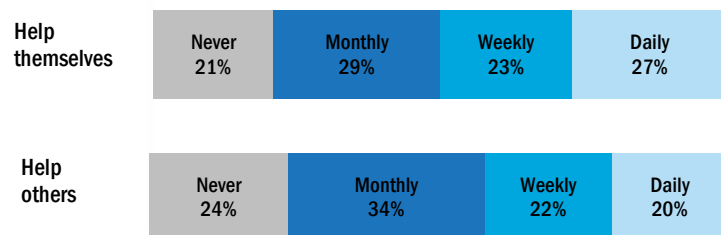
- Nine out of ten participants (88%) told at least one person about MHFA training.
- A majority (87%) also shared knowledge gained from the training with others.

Participants used Mental Health First Aid training to help themselves or others

- Three quarters of participants indicated that they used their MHFA training to help themselves (79%) or others (76%) monthly, weekly, or daily.
- Participants most commonly used their training to help someone with depression (59%), anxiety (50%), general mental health (42%), substance misuse (26%), and suicide (24%).
- Participants most commonly used their training at work (51%), with friends (41%), and at home (30%).

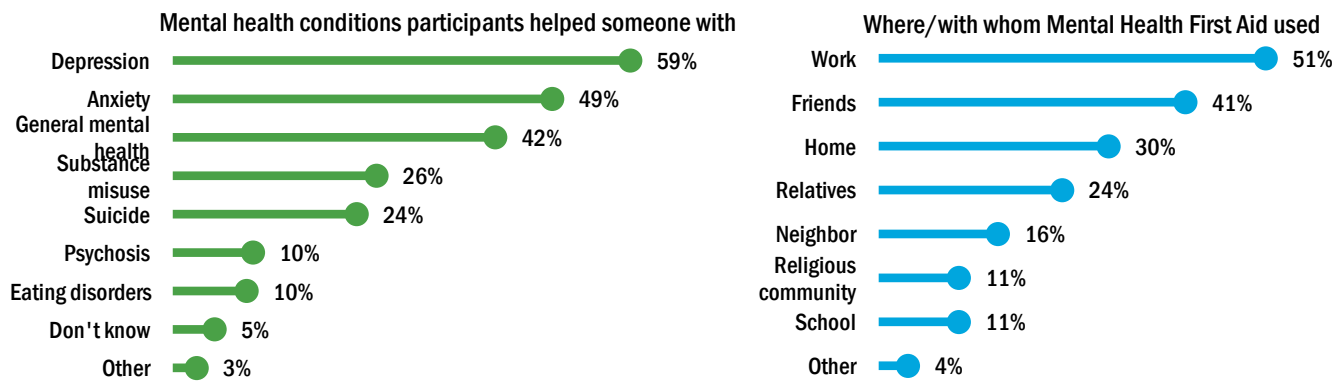
Data Source: Evaluation of Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Training Survey, 2018, was sent electronically to all MHFA participants with a valid email address. Between December 2015 and August 2018, over 75,000 individuals attended MHFA training; of these, 38,509 had valid email addresses and received an invitation to complete the survey. A total of 6,270 participants responded to the survey, of whom 5,827 completed at least 50% of the survey questions directly pertaining to the training and that did not involve skip patterns. The survey response rate among participants who completed at least 50% of the survey was 15.1%, representing 7.8% of all participants. All percentages presented are among those who answered 50% of the questions (n = 5,827). Participants had completed MHFA training anywhere from less than one month to 33 months before taking the survey; a majority of participants (59% of n = 5,827) had completed training within the six months prior to taking the survey. Compared to participants who did not respond, the survey sample had a higher proportion of White, Multiple Race, and American Indian/Alaskan Native participants and a lower proportion of Latino/a, Asian, and “Other Race” participants. Compared to non-respondents, the survey sample had a higher proportion of women and individuals categorized as “other” gender and a lower proportion of men. The survey sample included a higher proportion of individuals who were trained in the six months prior to the distribution of the survey (September of 2018) compared with participants who did not take the survey.

Percentage of surveyed participants who regularly used Mental Health First Aid training to help themselves or others, New York City, 2018



Data Source: Evaluation of Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Training Survey, 2018

Percentage of surveyed participants who used Mental Health First Aid knowledge and skills post-training to help someone with mental health conditions at work, among friends, or at home, New York City, 2018



Note: Categories not mutually exclusive.

Data Source: Evaluation of Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Training Survey, 2018

Participants felt confident in skills conferred by training

- Participants rated their confidence in the skills MHFA taught highly. These skills included: ability to recognize that someone may be dealing with a mental health problem or crisis, recognizing and correcting misconceptions about mental health challenges, and offering a distressed person basic information and reassurance; the median rating for each of these skills was four out of a possible five on a scale of strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Three quarters of participants were women and two thirds had a college degree

- The most common age range for participants was 25 to 44 (45%), followed by 45 to 60 (37%), 61 and older (11%), and 18 to 24 (6%).
- Most participants had at least a college degree or higher (68%); 27% had finished high school, 1% did not have a high school degree, and 4% did not specify.
- The most common self-reported racial or ethnic group among participants was Black (39%), followed by Latino/a (27%), White (20%), Asian (9%), Multiple Race (3%), Other Race (1%), and American Indian/Alaskan Native (0.5%).
- Seventy-five percent identified as women.
- Twenty-eight percent of participants lived in Brooklyn, 18% lived in Queens, 15% lived in the Bronx, 14% lived in Manhattan, 4% lived in Staten Island, and 21% did not report their borough of residence.
- Forty-two percent were affiliated with a city agency and 59% were affiliated with an organization other than a city agency, such as faith-based organizations, private businesses, and higher education institutions.

Definitions: Race/ethnicity: Race was defined as participants' response to the question: "How would you describe your race? Select all that apply." Participants who chose more than one race were coded as Multiple Race, according to the US Census guidelines. For the purpose of this publication, Latino/a includes persons of Hispanic or Latino/a origin, as identified by the survey question: "Are you of Hispanic origin or descent?" and regardless of reported race. Black, White, Asian, Multiple Race, Other Race, and American Indian/Alaska Native race categories exclude those who identified as Latino/a.

"Other" gender: Participants were categorized as "other" gender if they selected one of the following responses to the question "how would you describe your gender?": Transgender person, Non-binary person, N/A, prefer not to answer, other (please specify).

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Reference: 1 National Institute of Mental Health (2018). Mental Health Information – Statistics. Retrieved from <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/index.shtml> Accessed: July 25th, 2019

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