

Managing Mental Health within Rail

Case study: Delivering Psychoeducation on Trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) to Train Driver Managers

Author: Dr Stephanie Fitzgerald, RSSB

Abstract:

A 90-minute psychoeducational training was delivered to 60 driver managers as part of a 2-day training programme. The aim of the training was to improve knowledge around the causes, impact and management of traumatic events and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The training was trialled in the morning and the afternoon with two groups of 30 managers, in order to test engagement and receptiveness to the material. The material was well received and attendees reported increased knowledge of and confidence in managing employees who had been affected by a traumatic event. Managers also reported increased self-awareness and ability to recognise their own symptoms following the training, and were able to manage or seek help accordingly. Excellent feedback endorsed the training and provides encouragement for further delivering such training to industry.

Background:

Due to the nature of rail fatalities and accidents staff within the rail industry are likely to experience a higher than normal exposure to potentially traumatic events (PTEs) than the average population. Almost all TOCs have a trauma management policy in place. Whilst the intention behind such policies is good, many have been devised without specialist clinician input. This has led to some poor practices being developed which may at best limit the support offered to those affected by PTEs and at worst some practices being in place which may actually trigger a PTSD response. Alongside these policies, a general lack of understanding around PTSD and trauma management was leading to high levels of misinformation and misdiagnosis. This lack of understanding was also reportedly leading to managers feeling ill-equipped to effectively manage and support members of staff affected by traumatic incidents.

As part of the RSSB mental health work-stream, a clear need to better the practice of trauma management was identified. Additionally, as part of our stakeholder engagement the HWB team have been working with TOC Boards and SLTs in order to improve understanding of mental health and how to progress in these areas. Following one of these Board meetings, the trainer was asked to deliver some training as part of a wider 2-day training course focusing on the area of trauma and trauma management/ the management of PTSD.

Aims:

The aims of the training were to:

- Improve understanding of Trauma and PTSD
- Improve identification of symptoms and management
- Understand treatment protocols and the type of treatment

Participants:

60 train driver managers participated in the trauma management training. Across the business these train driver managers managed over 1000 drivers. All participants reported either personal experience of witnessing a rail-fatality, or experience of managing a member of staff who had witnessed a rail fatality. The majority of participants reported both personally experiencing and managing those who had experienced a rail fatality. The participant demographics were 57 male TDMs and 3 female TDMs. Two additional participants from the HR sector of the business also attended.

Method:

A 90-minute psychoeducational training was delivered to two groups of 30 train driver managers. The training was based around the attached slides and was delivered by a Chartered Clinical Psychologist specialising in the treatment of trauma and PTSD. The training delivered had several key components:

- Explaining what was meant by a potentially traumatic event (PTE).
- Examining a 'typical' response to PTEs, exploring the difference between trauma and PTSD and 'myth-busting' some of the most commonly reported misconceptions around PTSD within the rail industry.
- Teaching participants to recognise symptoms under the biopsychosocial model of PTSD.

- Teaching participants to recognise the impact on them of managing either their own or others' traumatic responses.

The session ended with a Q&A where participants could raise cases they were currently struggling to manage and receive help and support, and raise any additional questions. This was followed by a brief exercise designed to 'lighten the mood' and leave participants feeling in a good place to continue their two-day training course.

Results:

All participants reported an increased understanding of, and confidence in managing, PTSD. Several participants also reported recognition of symptoms in drivers they are working with which had gone 'unnoticed'. Participants reported the recognition of their own symptoms and potential for vicarious trauma particularly helpful as this had never been covered under management training previously.

Participants reported a recognition of a lack of support structures for managers and were going to address this issue going forward. All participants reported finding the training meaningful.

The training was better engaged with in the morning than in the afternoon session. Due to the nature of the topic, the morning allowed individuals to discuss the topic and regroup for the afternoon sessions, whereas the content was reportedly 'a little heavy' for afternoon training.

Conclusion:

The training was popular, well received and delivered on its aims to improve the management of trauma and PTSD. A recommendation to widely deliver this training to companies in order to improve their understanding of trauma and PTSD and to develop a more consistent approach across the industry. Given the limited resources within the health and wellbeing team it is recommended that additional modes of delivery such as e-learning and resources are considered.

Discussion:

The anonymised feedback below is from the SLT member who initially requested the training and should be seen as an endorsement for the training to be more widely rolled out across industry.

"I wanted to drop you a line to thank you very much for delivering your presentations on Understanding Trauma at the two day Driver Manager Seminars. The sessions were very well delivered and everyone took something away, for some it was the importance of looking after themselves... but for all of us it was a far better understanding of what PTSD is and that it is an actual physiological change rather than a feeling.

In our industry it is vitally important for us to understand what our members of staff go through, when they face a fatality or suffer traumatic events in their lives and more importantly, how best to support them.

Thank you very much for spending the time with us and I hope we can do something else in the future."