

Men's Creative Mental Health Group Report

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What are the benefits of attending a Men's Creative Mental Health and Wellbeing Group?

Reflecting on recent statistics within the UK, men's mental health has become an increasingly recognised public health issue. According to the Mental Health Foundation (2026), "three times as many men as women die by suicide", with men aged 40–49 demonstrating the 'highest suicide rates within the UK.' In response to this, the promotion of accessible men's support groups may play a significant role in reducing isolation, encouraging emotional openness and improving overall wellbeing.

Research surrounding community-based men's mental health groups remains relatively limited. Therefore, as an Undergraduate Psychology student on placement, I had the opportunity to observe two creative men's support groups based in Armley, Leeds, within Creative Frame CIC. These weekly groups focused on creative activities including music rehearsal and photography/videography projects.

The groups were primarily attended by men within the age demographic identified as being at higher suicide risk. The purpose of these groups is to provide accessible peer support through shared creative activities within the community. This is particularly important considering the socioeconomic challenges present within some areas of Leeds, including higher levels of deprivation and social disadvantage. Therefore, this report explores how creative men's groups may positively influence emotional safety, group cohesion, confidence and social support.

Presentation of Data Collected

Figure 1. Data Collection of cues throughout 7 group sessions

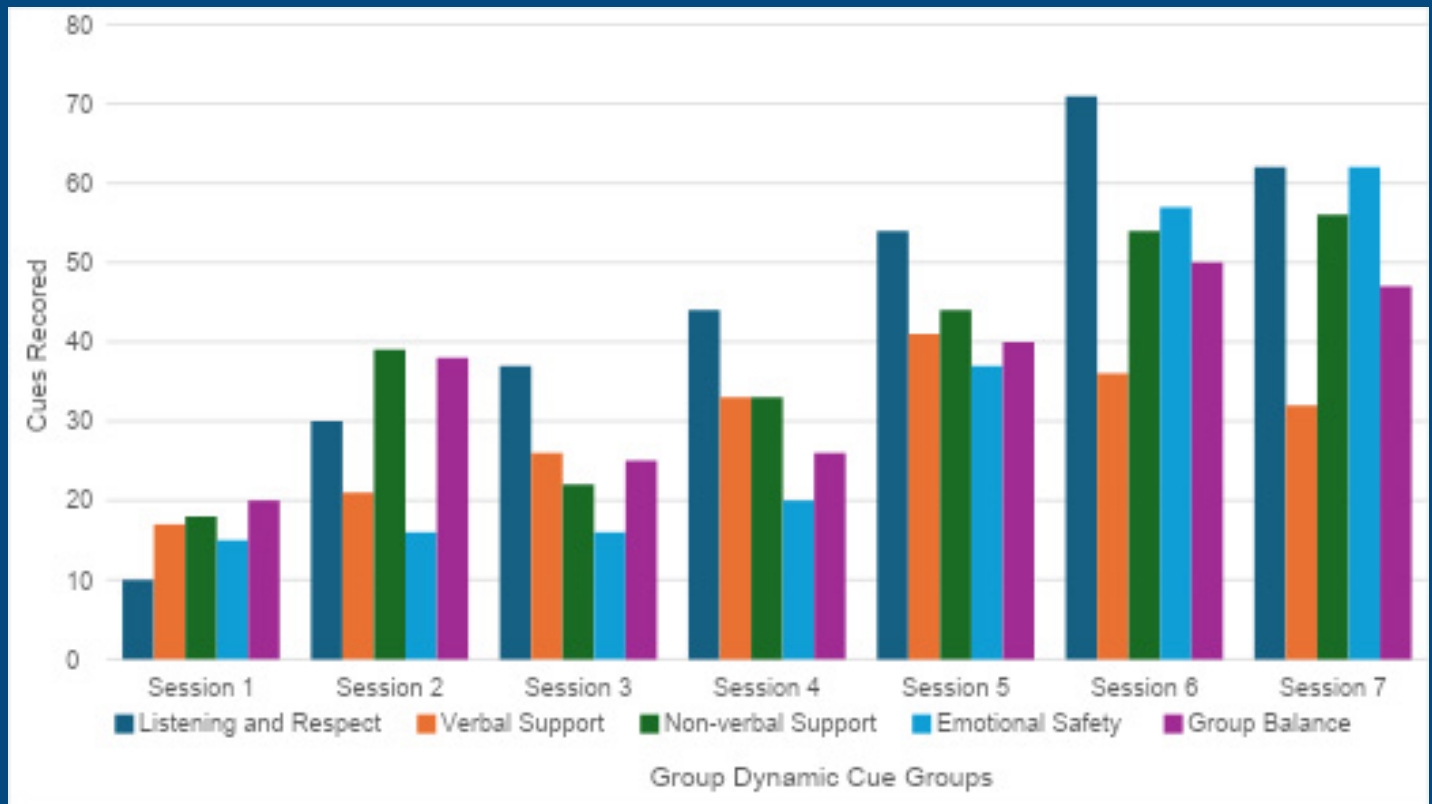
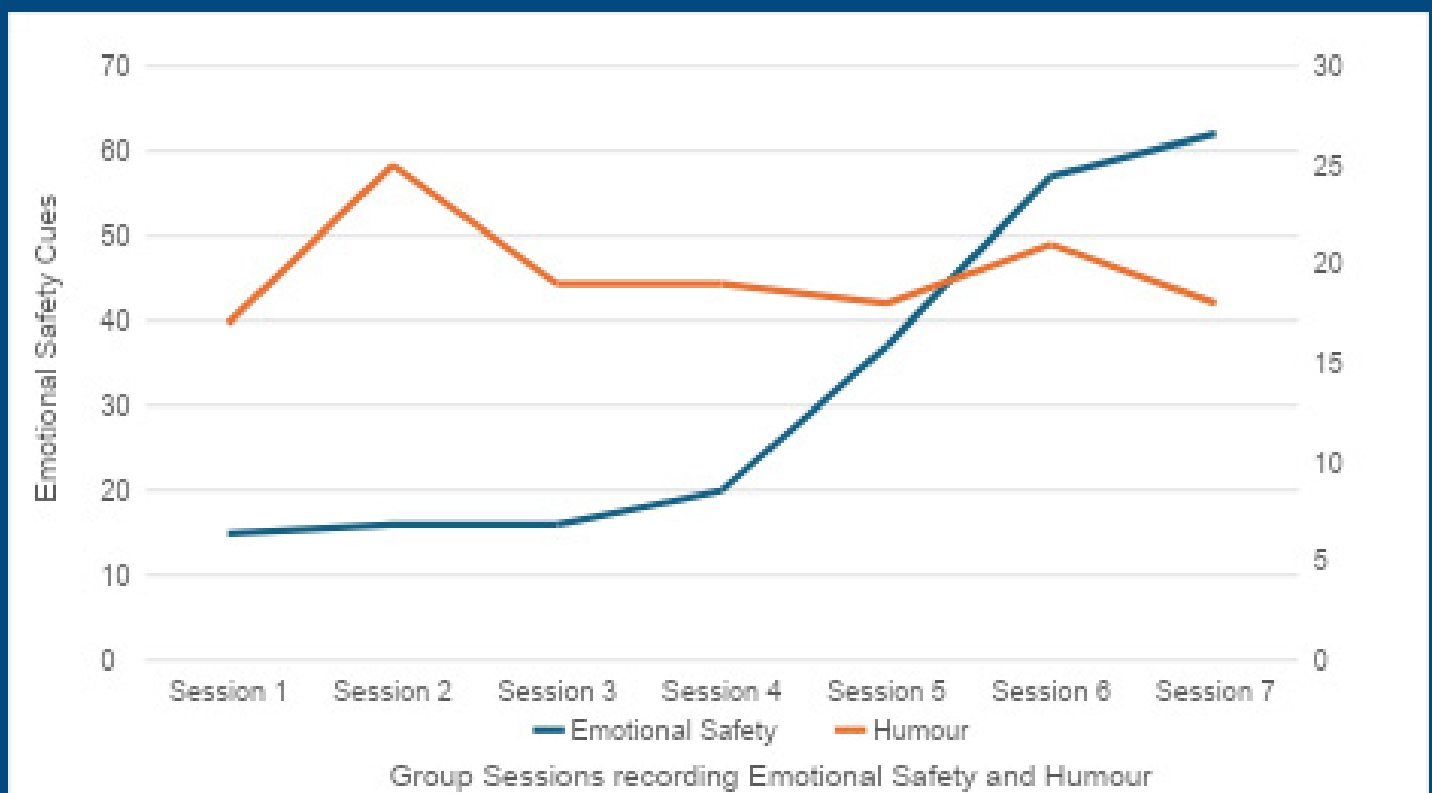


Figure 2. Emotional Safety interaction with humour



Evaluation of Data

Van der Kolk (2014) explains that “our bodies are shaped to ensure our survival.” This perspective may help explain the significance of the relaxed body language repeatedly observed throughout sessions, including smiling, laughter, dancing, calm posture, eye contact and engaged non-verbal communication. These behaviours may suggest that members experienced both physical and emotional safety within the group environment.

From a researcher perspective, humour appeared to play a substantial role within both group environments and was often a consistent undertone of interaction. The strong interpersonal bonds between members were highly observable, with humour frequently used to facilitate advice, encouragement, reassurance, and collaborative problem-solving. This may partly reflect the length of time members had attended the groups together, contributing to increased familiarity and trust.

Humour was often integrated into emotionally supportive interactions, particularly during moments involving constructive criticism, mistakes during rehearsal or emotional vulnerability. This overlap between humour and emotional safety (see Figure 2) suggests that humour functioned as a form of emotional regulation within the group dynamic. Rather than dismissing emotions, humour appeared to reduce tension and create a psychologically safe environment where members felt comfortable expressing concerns, asking questions and admitting difficulties. However, keeping in mind I am a student, this may have had an effect on the earlier data collections. Due to lack of experience acknowledging cues in the fast-paced environment, this may have left some missed cues at the beginning of the study.

Further Researcher Notes During Data Collection

An important observation throughout this, was that these groups were not centred around the exclusion of women, but rather the acknowledgement and support of men's mental health. Women were occasionally present within sessions and their involvement appeared to make little difference to the positive group dynamic observed. Furthermore, performances completed within community settings were enjoyed by diverse audiences, suggesting that these groups may positively contribute not only to individual wellbeing, but also to wider community connection and inclusion.

Furthermore, one member described the group as an “escape”, explaining that participation within the music group allowed them to focus on one task and temporarily disconnect from external stressors associated with their dissociative disorder. This reflects how creative group spaces may provide grounding, structure and emotional regulation for individuals experiencing mental health difficulties. Van der Kolk (2014) argues that “feeling safe is the beginning of healing”, highlighting the importance of supportive social environments in emotional recovery. This was strongly reflected within the observed groups, where members consistently demonstrated reassurance, patience, validation and collaborative support.

Setting Up Men's Mental Health Groups

From observation, a key reason these creative groups appear effective is the utilisation of an open and relaxed environment where members are free to engage in activities or informal conversation without excessive structure or pressure. The groups did not rely heavily upon rigid rules, but instead adopted a calm atmosphere that encouraged emotional openness, humour, collaboration and mutual support.

Creative activities such as music and film production may additionally contribute towards increased confidence, self-esteem and sense of purpose. This was particularly evident within the music group, where members collectively worked towards performances and community events. A member had specifically expressed they felt a sense of 'purpose' joining these groups they had felt a lack of before, presenting an effectiveness in improving mental health in these individuals. However, it was also observed that increased goal orientation occasionally introduced pressure or tension amongst members. Therefore, maintaining balance between achievement and wellbeing may be an important consideration for future group development.

Gentle reminders that the purpose of the group is emotional support and enjoyment, rather than perfection, may help preserve the psychologically safe environment. Funding is an essential factor in sustaining community mental health groups, particularly creative groups requiring equipment, transport or performance resources. External support from councils, charities and community grants may significantly improve accessibility and long-term sustainability of these interventions.

One last key characteristic of the groups held is that they do not adopt a structured layout that might feel demanding for the members but instead has this relaxed environment allowing freedom to speak. A key part of this identified, is having time at the end of sessions to chat freely about what may be on their mind with no built-in structure. This is ideally purposed for the members and hosts to leave the group in a safe mindset if sensitive subjects were addressed/on the forefront of their minds.

Future research could explore differences across varying demographics of men, such as age, ethnicity, employment status, or severity of mental health difficulties. Additionally, comparing male and female support group dynamics may provide further insight into how emotional support and group cohesion differ across settings.

Conclusion

Overall, this report suggests that creative men's support groups may positively contribute towards emotional wellbeing, social connection, confidence and psychological safety within the community. The observed groups consistently demonstrated strong cohesion, humour, collaborative support and emotional openness. Although increased goal orientation occasionally introduced pressure, members were generally able to regulate this collectively through humour, reassurance and shared reflection. Therefore, the continued development and promotion of accessible community-based men's groups may provide meaningful benefits for both individuals and wider communities.

