

Health Inequalities in Northern Ireland: The Impact of the MAS Project - Key Research Findings

Introduction

This briefing provides an overview of findings from primary research conducted by the Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA) on the impact of the Maternal Advocacy and Support (MAS) project on maternal mental health in Northern Ireland. The MAS research report is the first chapter of a research project conducted by WRDA into health inequalities faced by women in Northern Ireland.

Methodology

Primary research was conducted with participants of the MAS project in the form of an anonymous online survey and four focus groups. These focus groups included three in-person sessions in women's centres and one online session on Zoom. There were 31 responses received to the anonymous online survey. The Researcher on this project was Aoife Mallon, Policy Assistant at WRDA.

Context

It is estimated that one in five women experience mental health issues during pregnancy or in the year after giving birth. Despite the prevalence of these issues, Northern Ireland lags significantly behind the rest of the United Kingdom in terms of providing the required services and support for mothers in the region. For example, Northern Ireland is currently the only devolved region of the United Kingdom without a Mother and Baby Unit (MBU).

The MAS project is led by WRDA, in partnership with Aware NI, and works with more than 200 women from across eight women's centres in Northern Ireland to develop a network of peer support groups for those experiencing perinatal mental health issues. This research examines the impact of this project on maternal mental health in communities, in the absence of adequate statutory provision.

Further Information

The full research report can be accessed [here](#). For more information about this research, please contact aoife.mallon@wrda.net. For more information about the work of WRDA, please visit our website [here](#) or contact info@wrda.net.



Key Findings

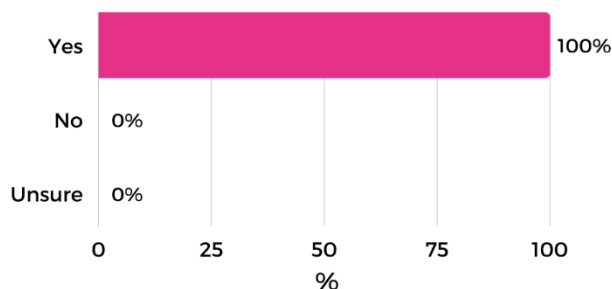


Survey Findings

Quantitative data from an anonymous online survey with MAS participants showed that **100%** of MAS participants felt more supported and better able to advocate as a result of participating in the MAS project, **94%** said that their participation in MAS had increased their confidence and **100%** said they would recommend the MAS project to others.

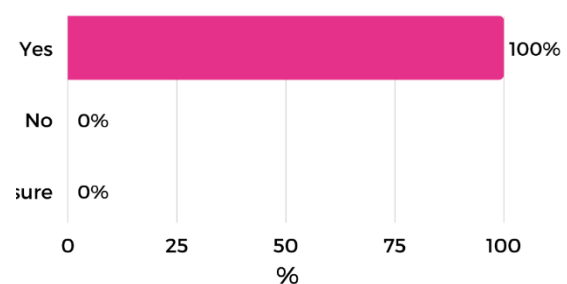
Q.5 Has your participation in the MAS project benefitted you in the following ways?

Feel more supported



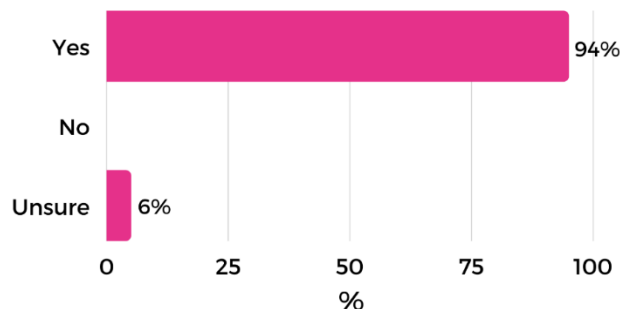
Q.5 Has your participation in the MAS project benefitted you in the following ways?

Better able to advocate



Q.5 Has your participation in the MAS project benefitted you in the following ways?

Increased confidence



Q.9 Would you recommend the MAS project to others?



100%

of MAS participants said they would recommend the MAS project to others.



Focus Group Findings

Qualitative data from focus groups with MAS participants showed that:

- As a result of being involved in the MAS project, participants said their **mental health had improved**, they had become **more confident** and **feelings of loneliness reduced**
- MAS has acted as a **'lifeline'** for mothers struggling with their mental health who **struggled to find support elsewhere**
- MAS provides a space for mothers to **build friendships**, **learn practical skills** and **access peer support** in the heart of their local community (women's centres)