



Support Group Attendee Report

November 2024

AWARE-NI.ORG



AWARE
OVERCOMING DEPRESSION.
CHANGING LIVES.

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Summary of Results



Demographics of Attendees

158 support group users completed the survey between 31/07/24 and 5/09/24.
2.2x as many as 2022

53% of respondents were female.

44% of respondents were male.

56% of respondents were aged 45-64.

30% of respondents were aged 25-44.



Impact of Support Groups

Almost all participants found the support groups helped with their feelings of:

Anxiety: **98%**

Depression: **96%**

Isolation: **95%**

76% of respondents found attending the support groups very beneficial overall.

22% of respondents found it somewhat beneficial.

How & Why People Use Support Groups

Most respondents self-referred to the support groups:



18% of respondents found us through social media or search engines.



15% of respondents found us through recommendation from family or friends.

The majority of respondents attended the groups to help manage their depression **81%**, anxiety **78%**, or low mood **62%**.

Other reasons for attending included trauma, grief or bereavement, bipolar, OCD, ADHD, autism, and personality disorders.

83% of respondents found they did not have any difficulty returning to the support group after their first meeting.

The majority of respondents had attended a support group for 2 years or longer **40%**, followed by those who attended for 1 to 2 years **21%**.

The Best Things About Support Groups



Being able to relate to others.



Having a confidential, non-judgmental and safe place to talk.



Feeling understood and supported.



Hearing about different experiences from other people.

What Makes an AWARE NI Support Group Unique?



THAT IT IS A PEER SUPPORT MODEL

OUR SKILLED & CARING FACILITATORS

OUR GROUPS ARE FREE TO ATTEND AND OPEN TO ALL

97%

of respondents would recommend the support groups to others

What Changes Would Respondents Like to See?

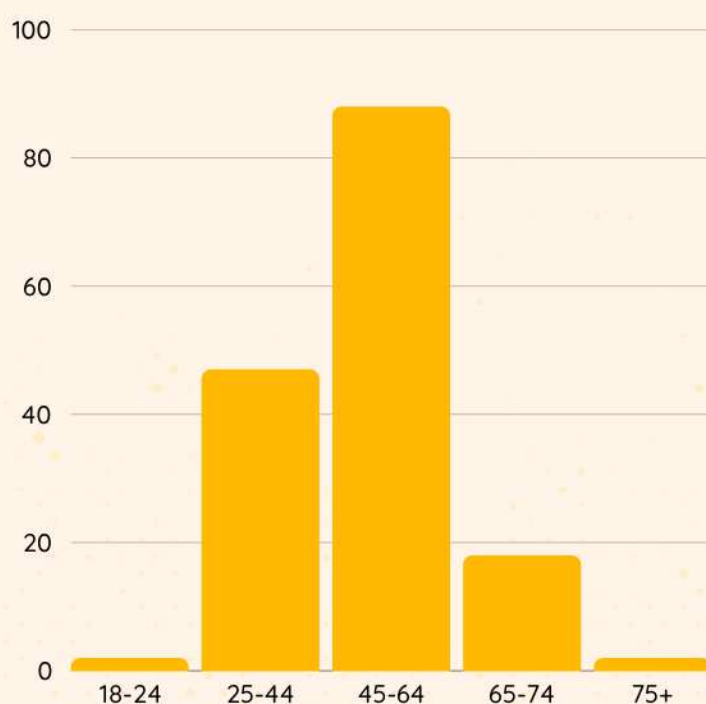
EXPANDED BRIDGING SERVICES

MORE GROUPS AND LONGER/MORE FREQUENT SESSIONS

Support group attendees from across Northern Ireland were asked to express their views on the groups by completing our survey. The survey went live on 31st July 2024 and closed on 5th September 2024. 158 valid responses were received, which was 2.2 times as many as in 2022.

Profile of Respondents

- 69 males (44%) and 84 females (53%) submitted their responses to the survey. 1% of respondents listed their gender as “other” and the remaining 2% preferred not to say.
- 45-64 remains the largest age group for respondents at 56%. The second largest group is 25-44, at 30%.

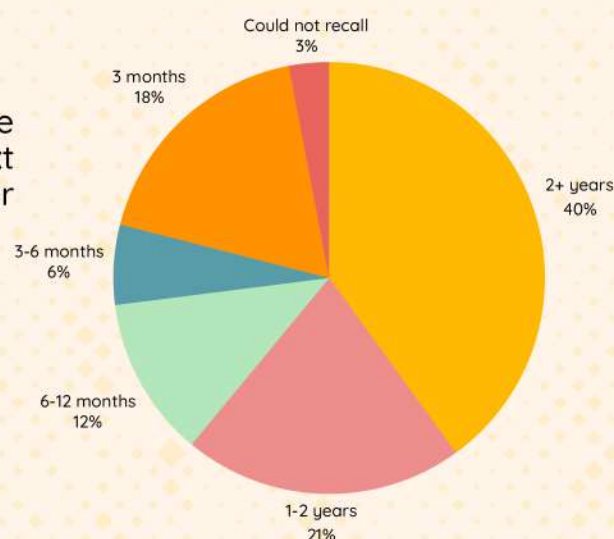


Length of Attendance

A substantial majority of respondents had attended the support groups for 2 years or longer (40%). The next largest group had been attending the groups for between 1 and 2 years (21%).

Of the remaining respondents:

- 18% had attended for up to 3 months
- 6% had attended for between 3 and 6 months
- 12% had attended for between 6 and 12 months
- 3% did not recall how long they had attended



How Did They Find Out About AWARE NI?

Respondents were asked how they found out about AWARE NI mental health support groups. The most common answers were:

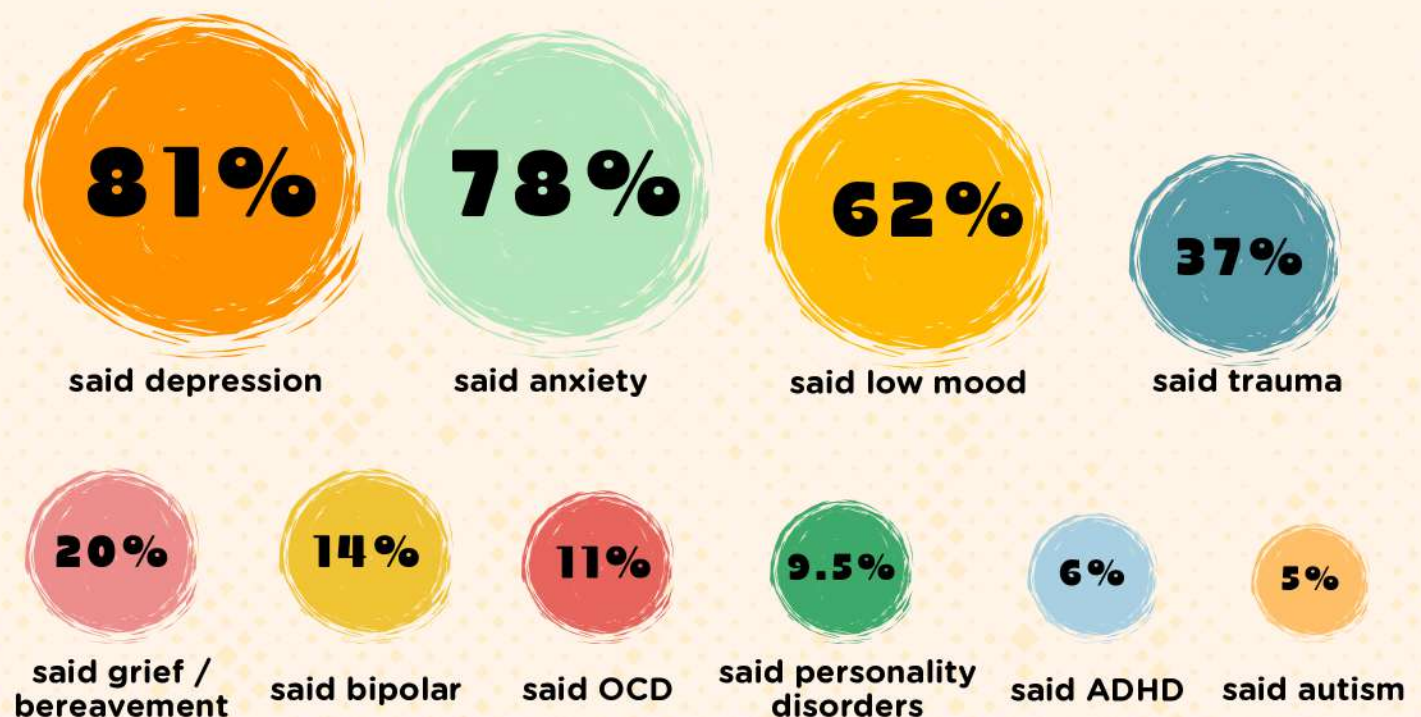
- 32% self-referred to the group
- 18% through social media or search engines
- 15% were recommended to the group by a family/friend
- 11% were referred by their Primary Community Mental Health team
- 11% were referred by their GP
- 8% were referred by their Recovery Mental Health team
- 3% through their Mental Health Hub
- 3% via an outreach event or partnership with their workplace
- 2.5% through a hospital
- 2% were referred by addiction services



3% of respondents found out about AWARE NI through a method not listed.

Reasons for Attending

Survey respondents were asked what their reasons were for attending an AWARE NI mental health support group. Respondents could select more than one reason, to reflect potential overlap.



Returning to a Support Group

Respondents were asked how easy they found it to attend subsequent groups after their first group meeting.

- 61% found it easy
- 22% found it neither easy nor difficult
- 15% had some difficulty
- Only 1% found it very difficult

83% OF RESPONDENTS FOUND THEY DID NOT HAVE ANY DIFFICULTY RETURNING TO THE SUPPORT GROUP AFTER THEIR FIRST MEETING.

Other Methods of Managing Mental Health

Respondents were asked what other methods they use to manage their mental health. The most common answers were:

- 75% medication
- 47% talking therapies
- 46% exercise
- 41% hobbies
- 33% mindfulness/meditation
- 29% diet/nutrition
- 22% volunteer
- 20% educate themselves on mental health topics
- 18% attend other support groups unrelated to AWARE NI
- 13% pursue complementary or alternative therapies



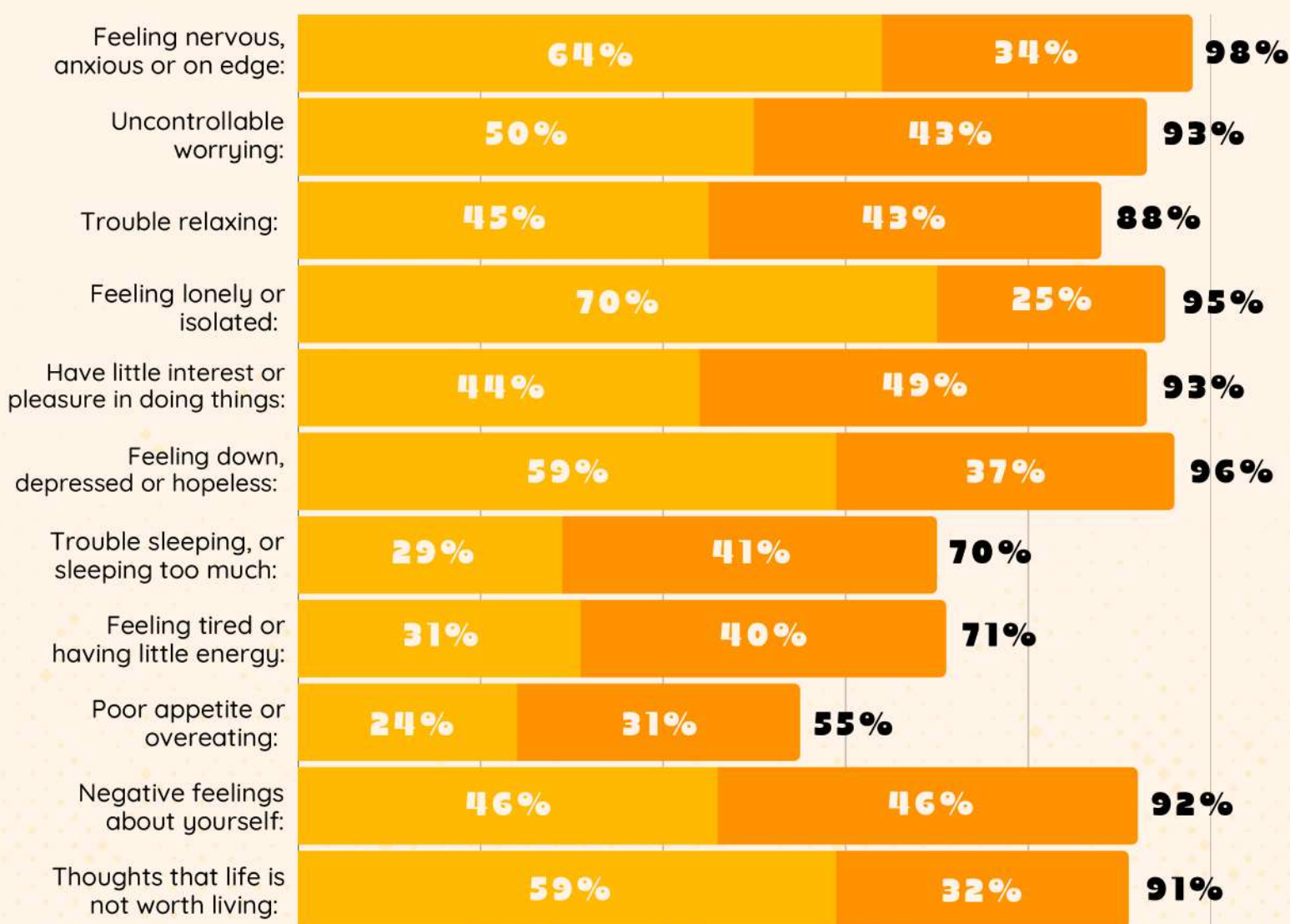
Only 2.5% of respondents said the AWARE NI mental health support groups were their only method of managing their mental health.



How Much Do the Support Groups Help?

In 2022, we asked respondents how they had been feeling by using three different inventories to look at symptoms of anxiety, symptoms of depression, and general wellbeing. This year we decided to condense this section and to instead ask respondents how much they feel the support groups help them to cope with the common symptoms of mental ill-health.

Legend for stacked row chart: ■ AWARE NI support groups help a lot
■ AWARE NI support groups help somewhat



When asked if they felt attending the support groups helps them overall, 76% of respondents said the groups help a lot, and a further 22% said they help somewhat. Only 2% of respondents felt that the groups had no effect overall.

The Best Things About Support Groups

The survey asked respondents what the best aspects of attending an AWARE NI mental health support group were. Respondents could select more than one aspect they felt was helpful.

- A large majority of respondents (87%) said they enjoyed relating to others in the groups
- 84% highlighted that the groups were a safe place for talk
- 81% highlighted that other people at the groups were non-judgmental
- 80% said that they felt understood and supported
- 77% of respondents agreed it was beneficial to hear different experiences from other people at the group
- 76% of respondents highlighted the peer support model used in the groups
- 65% of respondents stated the confidential nature of the groups
- Respondents enjoyed that the group was free of charge (68%) and accessible (49%)
- Over half of respondents found that the groups helped them to maintain wellbeing (55%)
- Almost half found the groups helpful in enabling self-help strategies (48%) and in signposting to other relevant services (41%)

Meeting with a group of people in similar situations as myself is a positive weekly focus for me that I look forward to.

Finding people who understand my depression and anxiety and connecting with them is healing.

Attending the group has really helped me feel more accepted by other people and helped motivate me to try and do better at working toward making my life more like how I want it to be.

There is total acceptance and understanding from the facilitators and a real sense of belonging in the group.

I found it hard to communicate with others around me, but the groups have helped me find my voice.



What Makes AWARE NI unique?

Respondents were asked what, in their opinion, makes AWARE's support groups unique compared to other services they have experience with. Four key features emerged from the responses:

- 1 Peer support model – companionship and belonging**
- 2 Non-judgmental, understanding and safe**
- 3 Free of charge and available/accessible to all**
- 4 Skilled and caring facilitators**

64% of responses to this question mentioned the peer support model and the feeling of companionship and belonging. They referred specifically to feeling they are not alone and the benefit of being with others who share their experiences.

28% spoke about the non-judgmental and safe environment in the groups. Many enjoyed that there was no pressure to speak, and that they felt free to say how they really felt.

19% liked that the support groups are free of charge and have no waiting lists, unlike many of the other options available to them. Several responses pointed out that you could go on attending the groups for as long as you like and weren't limited to a small number of sessions. Many also found the informal nature of the groups more welcoming than other services. A few responses stated that just knowing the groups were there and they could come and go was a comfort to them.

Finally, 14% highlighted the skill and compassion of the volunteer group facilitators. They mentioned that the facilitators were caring, empathetic, genuine and relatable. Several facilitators were mentioned by name as being especially supportive.

Other responses included confidentiality and signposting to other resources/services as unique features.

Recommending AWARE

97%

of respondents said they would recommend the AWARE NI mental health support groups to others.



What Could Be Improved About The Groups?

We were keen to discover any ways in which respondents felt the support groups could be improved. Overwhelmingly, respondents asked for:

1 Support groups in more locations

2 Group meetings to be longer and/or more frequent

Respondents were also keen to see AWARE NI provide more extensive bridging support, to help people to access the groups.

We are always working on expanding our support group services across the country and making them available to as many people as possible.

Our Current Support Groups

*As of November 2024



24

**Support Groups
Across Northern
Ireland including
three online**

You can find your nearest support group by searching:

aware-ni.org/support-groups

