The development and delivery of peer research

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Workshop aims

- Gain an understanding of peer research

- Be able to articulate the strengths and weaknesses of the approach

- Understand when the approach may and may not be suitable

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Current work:

- NIHR research grant with GCU and Bristol Uni – Epitope

- N of 1 - Minimum unit pricing study with University of Glasgow

- Navigate – Stirling - NIHR

- Peer research projects in Tayside, East Ayrshire, Fife and East Dunbartonshire

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What is peer research?

- Researcher and research participants share a similar experience – in our case, problematic substance use

- This is explicitly discussed and researchers identify themselves as 'peers' to the group being researched

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How does it work?

- Shared experience builds trust, common language, removes barriers around fears of judgment

- Can help create better relationships between service providers and users (Ning et al., 2010)

- Interviewees rate research as more enjoyable, easier to understand with peers, as well as feeling peers were more like them and easier to talk to (Hull study)

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What makes it different from other methodologies?

- Doing with not doing to – most research is inherently paternalistic, reinforcing existing dominant power hierarchies – especially with marginalised groups!

- Researchers have status and power given to them by the institutions they work in and by the general public

- Academic researchers, not the individuals being researched are seen as experts

- Tends to be theoretical knowledge rather than personal

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Types of peer research

•User involvement research

•Collaborative research

•User-led research

•Tends to be spectrum rather than discrete grouping, much research can involve elements of all three

•Our peer research: involvement throughout the project – info sheets, consent form, data gathering, analysis, report writing, presenting etc

Group discussions

- Can you think of possible advantages and disadvantages of the approaches?

Advantages and disadvantages

- Helps identify important research questions
- Service users more likely to open up and be honest
- Helps service users 'say what they think'
- Recruitment – peer networks may be useful for hard to reach groups
- Impact on peer researchers
- Power dynamic – power sharing, ownership of research

- Objectivity
- Support needs - Lapse/relapse
- Time/resource implications – even if volunteers it is not 'free'
- Tokenism
- Perceptions - where peer research is placed in research hierarchy
- **When do you stop being a 'peer'?**

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Our ethos

- SDF works to ensure that the opinions and experiences of people who use, or have used services influence service planning and delivery.

- Peer research allows the voices and experiences of people who have experienced or are experiencing problem substance use to be heard where decisions are being made

- Also gets people who do or do not use services views

- Peer research offers a unique and independent quality assurance mechanism to commissioners and/ or service providers.

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Our criteria for volunteers

- Lived experience of substance use – drugs and/or alcohol

- Able to commit to the project – group meetings, training, induction

- Able to be substance free while volunteering or otherwise representing SDF

- Interested in improving services

- Good time-keeping

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Top Tips from Peer Researchers

- Listen! Take lived experience seriously – we are able to engage with people on different levels than academic researchers
- Don't assume knowledge and use jargon and academic language
- But also don't be patronising – we have skills and experiences to be valued
- Make sure there are resources to support us
- Give us opportunities to grow and develop
- Support is crucial

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- Stigma – people will talk about things they wouldn't to researchers – particularly painful or shameful experiences

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Peer research in the substance user field

- Power – doing *with* not doing *to*
- Making knowledge accessible
- Expert by experience – valuing people's strengths and skills
- Co-production
- Empowerment
- Engaging with marginalised groups
- Hearing stories and evidence that we could not through other methods

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Ethics

- Tokenism – PPI is asked for – 'box ticking'
- Informed consent
- Training and support – EAP etc
- Valuing participation – vouchers, stipend
- Vulnerability – participant and peer
- Potential for coercion – voluntary participation – peers knowing peers
- Consistency - across peers and over time

Impact on peers

- Gains in confidence, skills and knowledge

- Variety of opportunities – conferences, training, events etc

- Supported to reach their goals

- Peer researchers often use this experience to go on to further education or employment – many go on to our own Addiction Worker Training Programme

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"Volunteering has boosted my confidence and allowed me to access training that will help in my next career move"

"Over the time spent volunteering with SDF my confidence, self-esteem and purpose in life have all changed for the better"

"It's great to be part of SDF, I am not judged on my past addiction and I feel valued"

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Volunteer processes

- Recruitment process

- Induction

- Training

- Support

- Personal development

- Volunteer opportunities

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What peer research is… And is not!

- Time and resources
- Genuine participation at all stages
- Valuing, supportive and empowering
- Opportunities for feedback
- Flexibility
- High quality training
- PVGs and other safeguarding

- Rushed timescales
- Inappropriate resources
- Power imbalances
- Support not accessible or appropriate
- Assumptions made

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Group discussion

- When people would/wouldn't use peer research in their areas/services (+service user involvement?)

- When would someone stop being a 'peer'? What about academics/workers with 'lived experience'?

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- SDF has over 25 years experience using this model and a range of trained peer researchers across the country

- We are available to provide input and advice about peer research and user involvement approaches

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Q & A