Service Users Involvement in Research

Why involve users in researching social work?

To improve on existing knowledge which is lopsided by being generated only by professionals, thus excluding users who are the major stakeholder to health and social care and who have considerable lived experience to learn from;

Enabling users: involvement, engagement, empowerment;

Enhancing the credibility of research among those who feel it is imposed on them by people who do not understand their perspective
Why Now?

- Having a more vocal user movement in a number of countries;
- Recognition that the involvement of users (and carers) in auditing and planning services may enhance the quality of services and their acceptability to those who use them;
- The impact of the strengths and social disability models

Service Users Involvement in Research
Historically involvement and working towards co-production in social work education and social care have emerged prior to their emergence in health (Croft & Berresford, 1993, Ramon & Sayce, 1993).

The Strengths approach has developed in social work much earlier than its appearance in health (Rapp, 1989, Saleeby, 1992).

Likely reasons for this difference
Policy and practice

Some new policy measures which include greater involvement of service users and carers have been implemented first in social care, such as individual budgets (Carr, 2010).

SCIE has highlighted the increasing number of services which utilise a co-production approach (SCIE guide 51), mostly in the voluntary sector.
Most social care user-involved research applies the Participative Research Approach, because it;

- Focuses on enabling different perspectives to be heard;
- PAR is structured in a way which gives decision power to the different participants;
- Has been used in health and social care, but mainly for the purpose of involving practitioners;
- Enables action/change in everyday reality to take place side by side with researching it.
Examples of such research

Social work education: Users, students and social work practitioners’ views on social work education in Cambridge and Sarajevo (Maglajlic, 2003).

Young People Participation: Whitmore (2001) worked with young people in a drop in centre on what need to be changed in the centre.
Empowerment through research

Videmsek (2014) worked for two years with a group of five experts-by-experience researchers on the meaning of empowerment for people living in group homes in Slovenia.

Such homes are led by social workers.
Tel Hai and Cambridge: A comparative study of students’ views on involving service users as trainers (Ramon et al, 2014)

With the involvement of older people as co-researchers: 2011-2012

Funded by the British Council

Comparing 3rd year students in both social work undergraduate courses

With a contribution of a service user lecturer
Methodology

- The complex needs of comparative methodology
- Concept mapping
- Vignettes
Key differences

- At Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) service users are involved systematically in training since 2003, as in the rest of the UK.
- At Tel Hai they are involved in some courses, but not in others.
Key differences 2

ARU has trained older people to become researchers in a 4 months course.

They created a co-operative titled Why Not? and work for local authorities as researchers.

They were recruited to contribute as the co-researchers of this study in the UK, for pay.
Key differences 3

- At Tel Hai service users have not acted as co-researchers before.
- We recruited people from the older people centre which is also based in Tel Hai, where some people studied together with sw students in the gerontology course.
- They were supported by the social worker of the centre.
The value of user involvement in participative research to students and practitioners in social work

- Activating students;
- Enabling them to appreciate research through doing it;
- A contribution to the organisations in the community;
- A bridge between practitioners, clients and researchers;
- Students and lecturers; the university and the community;
- An integral ingredient in any inquiry-action-learning sequence;
- Demystifying research;
- Energising demoralised practitioners;
- Enables ownership which can be carried out to implementation of findings into practice
**Barriers to success**

- Research as an unsafe practice, in which the unexpected is likely to happen (but the unexpected can be positive too..);

- Fears of potential funders, ethics committees, and likely participants in different key positions (risk to SU, to the quality of the study);

- This type of research is unsuitable for large samples; this goes against the strong belief in the value of large numbers and of RCT by many health researchers;

- Need to recognise individual and collective limitations: not every user can do it;

- Fear of users of being taken over by professional researchers;

- When can users do it on their own and when they cannot
References