

Rolling with it: The importance of pragmatics in homelessness field research

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Background

- ▶ Thesis Project
- ▶ Homelessness, Brain Injury, Cognitive Impairment
- ▶ Semi-structured interviews across multiple services
- ▶ 17 participants

Challenges

- ▶ Vulnerable population with multiple, complex issues
- ▶ An area of stretched resources, increasing demand
- ▶ Encountering clinical needs while in a research role
- ▶ Gathering quantitative data while hearing the very personal, often traumatic, stories of participants

What did this look like on the ground?

- ▶ Different services, different teams, different groups of service-users meant understanding of the project/my role varied.
- ▶ Individuals in distress were often sent to “the brain guy”.
- ▶ Participants frequently wanted to spend time and their stories with someone.
- ▶ Service-users initially wary of me and what I was doing there.

What helps?

- ▶ Be available, open & friendly - spend lots of time in common areas - be visible!
- ▶ Building relationships with staff/service-users is KEY - dedicate the time.
- ▶ Recognise the demands on staff, adapt to their schedules.
- ▶ Listen and value people's stories even if they don't end up participating.
- ▶ Monitor & reflect on your boundaries but flexibility is needed.
- ▶ Have support/supervision to discuss the novel & emotional situations that occur daily.
- ▶ Have a clear way to deal with the clinical issues that arise.

What I learned

- ▶ Daily homelessness support is an extremely emotive environment with a lot of people in distress.
- ▶ Staff work hard to manage this distress often without the training/support to do so - risk of burnout is high.
- ▶ That many people were often seeking to be heard by another human being - many expressed how lonely they felt.
- ▶ The level of need is so high, two out of 17 participants died.
- ▶ Resilience of those who had been through so much!
- ▶ People experience so many traumatic events that many can overlooked by those around them e.g. the effects of assaults, brain injuries.
- ▶ There is a such pull to do more and more and more...

The Study

- ▶ Cognitive Impairment was common - 14/17 participants had scores in the range of learning disability.
- ▶ Brain injury was experienced by most (14/16)
- ▶ GP, A&E used very frequently (e.g. 84 times in a year by one participant).
- ▶ Mental health services rarely used.
- ▶ Brain injury services never used despite clear needs.

Thank you for listening

Keep in touch ☺

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Questions?