



Recovery Science and Harm Reduction Reading Group: January 2022 Summary

Article Summary

This article describes the experiences of community partners with participation in research projects. The authors provide background information about the importance of collaborative approaches in health interventions, specifically for harm reduction intervention. The specific study examined in this article is called OUTSIDER, which has the goal of increasing outreach for safer injecting drugs education. In this study, the authors facilitated three focus groups with outreach workers to examine their views surrounding the implementation and evaluation of a harm reduction education intervention to help people who inject drugs inject more safely in off-site settings. The authors identified multiple areas of tension between research stakeholders and outreach stakeholders, including challenges related to using scientific versus practical knowledge and methods. The authors noted a need for collaborative research that includes equitable participation and integration of experience from both community stakeholders and research stakeholders. Additionally, the authors noted the need for clarity surrounding how and why the scientific process can be compatible with the realities of service provision for people who use drugs.

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Harm Reduction Journal

RESEARCH

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Interaction and conflict between outreach workers and research officers in implementing collaborative action research in the field of harm reduction: a qualitative study

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Abstract

Background: The effectiveness of collaborative approaches in health interventions is underlined in the literature. Given the serious challenges to adequately managing the HCV epidemic in people who inject drugs (PWID), and the need to improve existing harm reduction (HR) interventions in this population, it seems important to investigate how collaboration between stakeholders is ensured in action research interventions. The present study aimed to explore interactions between outreach workers and research officers collaborating in the implementation of an action research project for PWID entitled OUTSIDER.

Methods: Using three focus groups, we studied the views of 24 outreach workers involved in the implementation and evaluation of a harm reduction educational intervention to help PWID inject more safely in off-site settings.

Results: The analysis of participants' discourses highlighted the mixed perceptions they had about OUTSIDER. Several limitations to collaboration emerged. Epistemological (theoretical vs. practical knowledge), methodological (science vs. intervention), axiological (standardised vs. adapted approach), and material (mobilised vs. available resources) issues all placed a burden on the outreach worker-research officer relationship. Outreach workers' acceptance of the project's intervention dimension but rejection of its scientific dimension highlights a lack of contractualisation between the stakeholders involved, and a more general problematisation of the role of outreach workers in implementing action research in HR. How collaboration was perceived and practised by outreach workers participating in OUTSIDER can be considered a reflection of the current challenges to implementing action research in HR.

Conclusion: This study of the interaction between the research and implementation dimensions of an action research project explored the tensions between different intervention stakeholders that must work together. Equitable participation and integration of the expertise, practices, and knowledge of all stakeholders involved is essential for successful action research. Given current HCV epidemiological challenges, new forms of cooperation are needed when developing healthcare services and when strengthening collaborative approaches.

Keywords: Hepatitis C, Drug injection, Collaborative action research, Focus group, Outreach workers

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Introduction

Collaborative action research in the field of harm reduction
In the field of health, collaborative action research—where researchers and healthcare practitioners collaborate together—is recognised as a key element in



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Key meeting themes



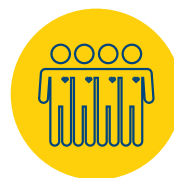
Communication challenges



Clinical versus research perspectives



Need for effective collaboration



Address immediate community needs

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

The following themes came from the discussion:



Communication challenges

Attendees shared and discussed challenges that they've experienced in community research surrounding communication challenges between researchers and outreach stakeholders, such as clarity of, timeliness, and validation within communication.



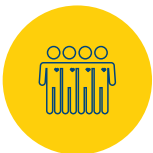
Clinical versus research perspectives

Attendees discussed how differences in perspectives relating to either clinical or research backgrounds can lead to challenges in the community research processes. Attendees noted that most folks typically have research experiences or clinical experiences and may not always understand the opposite perspective.



Need for effective collaboration

Group attendees discussed and emphasized the authors' point regarding effective collaboration between researchers and community stakeholders. Clear communication was emphasized as being necessary to facilitate effective collaboration.



Address immediate community needs

Reading group attendees identified and discussed the need for community-based research to focus more on the specific needs of community members, rather than focus on research theories that may not have immediate benefits for the community.



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