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Insider/Outsider collaborative police and health
research. The challenges and facilitators

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Aim

- To explore and discuss the tensions of Insider/Outsider positions in practitioner research through the experience of one researcher who has grappled with holding a complex mix of health/police/researcher identities.
- The challenges, facilitators and management of such a position within research will be discussed along with the acknowledgement of the benefits such a complex position brings.

Professional background

- Lecturer in mental health nursing, researcher and PhD student
- Adult and mental health nurse in clinical practice for 30 years in Australia and Scotland
- Worked in public health, mental health and police services.
- Dual professional insights
- Well established and valued professional relationships in health and police

- PhD study of the interface and pathway between police, those in mental health distress and emergency health services
- Passionate about the issue and strong desire to bridge a gap in understanding
- Understood the phenomena through both professional lenses and insights into the experiences of those in mental health distress through working in this area.

Benefits

- Organisational knowledge were influential and beneficial to the study design (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000).
- Positive and trusting relationships with gatekeepers supporting access to data, participants and knowledge within both services - clear benefits.
- Clinical experience engaging with PWEMD offered opportunities to fully engage with all three agents in the study.

Study aim

To understand the pathways and interface between police officers, health service practitioners and those in mental health distress who initially present to, and are returned to, police services for subsequent management following mental health assessment.



What could get in the way?!

- A tension developed between the subjective assumptions made as a practitioner and the objectivity of being a researcher
- Ethical challenges, potential bias and possible threats to study viability were a constant consideration through the research method development phase.
- Become highly sensitive and apprehensive regarding the possible negative consequences my practice relationships, familiarity and assumptions would have on the validity of the study.

Search for a position to make sense of this ...



- Challenges and opportunities of 'Insider' and 'Outsider' research are well documented.
- Brown(1996) takes this one step further in relation to police research and suggests four potential positions. Insider /insider, insider outsider, outsider /outsider and outsider/insider. All with complexities and challenges
- Found myself in a position of being an insider and outsider and neither in both services involved in the study all at the same time.

- Insider - Can overcome barriers of access to participants and data. Insights and good subject knowledge support interpretation. Yet, perception of relative power, familiarity and potential bias particularly in relation to data collection and analysis.
- Outsider- Bias is less likely. Fresh eyes on topic. However, can misinterpret data through lack of subject knowledge. Floyd and Arthur (2012) suggest that once the research has been completed and written up, ethical concerns fade naturally into the background for some 'outsiders' which can be dangerous

Challenges for this researcher

- Viewed as an insider by both services.
- Forced a greater consciousness of the situation (Moule 2015). Development of the study approach took time
- Case study approached allowed viewing through the agent lenses
- Need for transparency throughout the study (Latimar 2003)



Facilitators

- Viewed as an insider by both services...
- Mantzoukas (2005) - bias is not by definition counterproductive if the researcher's bias is fully incorporated and apparent throughout the study. Need to identify my bias!
- Ethical considerations have been at the forefront of this study strengthening the work.

Finding a comfortable place

- Rather than consider this issue from a dichotomous perspective, there is a space between which allows researchers to occupy the position of both ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ rather than ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’. This position can be unique and thus bring increased flexibility and understanding to explore the ‘complexity and richness’ of the research. (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle 2009)

Management

- Participate in a reflexive interview to support her own understanding, transparency within the study and identify authenticity of evidence and ethical issues (Holloway and Freshwater 2007).
- For non-positivist studies, reflection is used to reveal the researcher bias, and should be included rather than excluded from the study(Mantzoukas 2005) .

Ethics

- Study design - considerations in the context of a complex human situation
- Ethics approval – NHS –intense scrutiny, need for constant justification and challenge ethics committees who had limited insights into police research and processes. 9 months.
- Police Scotland research processes clearer and supportive

Benefits

- Familiarity of processes and systems when designing study approach
- Clinical background to support screening to prevent harm
- Insight into vulnerability, disclosure of risk and considerations of harm in recounting 'story'
- Gatekeeper buy in by both services
- A welcomed study by both police and health

Management

Data collection

- Conscious of interview technique. Need to be clever about questioning to get depth of narrative
- Easy to fall into familiar conversations and move from interview schedule

Analysis

- Template analysis allowed for quality checks and reflexivity.
- Audit trail
- Coding checking of same transcripts with researcher out with study.

Constant reflection and justification

- Assumptions about the researcher as a detached, objective observer – argue this not true.
- Constant self reflection and checking out assumptions with colleagues

Conclusion

- Researchers with multiple identities must consider their insider and outsider perspectives and manage this is openly.
- A unique position which has been valued
- Rather than limit the study it has brought a richness and depth
- Ethical dilemmas and tussles brought headaches, sleepless nights yet great learning
- Constant strive to be transparent and reflective has strengthen the work
- Sincere appreciation of the trust afforded to me by service users, gate keepers, police and health service participants

Thank you



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