Reviewer’s report

Title: Motivations and experiences of volunteers and patients in mental health befriending: A thematic analysis

Version: 0 Date: 03 Sep 2018

Reviewer: Janhavi Vaingankar

Reviewer's report:

Authors have explored befriender-befriendee relationships with a qualitative study design and provided three key themes within this alliance. While similar work has been conducted previously and elsewhere, considering that such services are still in a state of flux and development, this is an interesting and relevant piece of research that is also largely executed, written and discussed well using appropriate bibliography.

I would however like to suggest further clarifications and considerations to be included in the manuscript. Despite these, I feel the paper highlights the complexity of the befriender-befriendee relationship and possibly highlights the importance of having some structure to the current fluid roles and processes involved in this service.

Suggested changes/comments:

In the Introduction, it may be useful to add some brief information on the befriender schemes. Volunteers belonged to 12 different schemes and it was not very clear to me how the schemes aligned or differed from each other. Were they largely similar and hence, comparable in terms of the experiences of the volunteers and clients? If not, the impact of this on the inferences drawn from the study should be discussed in the manuscript.

Methods:

1. To include interrater reliability / kappa statistics

2. Was any other sociodemographic or background information collected besides what is provided in the Table 2? Information on volunteers’ educational background / qualification, befriendedes' duration of illness, duration of befriender-befriendee relationship are important aspects which do not seem to come up during the thematic analysis. I find this surprising unless it was not of interest for this study.
Results:

Results are presented well. However, two important aspects seem to have been left out - befrienderes' motivations and expectations of this relationship. I note from the section on data collection that befrienderes were also asked about their motivations. However results around these are not evident to me in the manuscript. These are probably under the second theme on 'Impact'; however, I feel there is a difference between 'impact after signing up' versus 'motivation/expectations before enlisting'. With more emphasis on client-centred care, it is important to understand these nuances before pairing.

Another point - which is more an ethical concern - is the participant numbering provided with the verbatims. Current identity numbers eg. Volunteer 111, Befriendee 1022, are beyond the total number of participants of this study. How were these derived? Please pardon this question if these are just random numbers; however I feel if these IDs were provided by the referral source or have a potential to identify the participant in any way, these should not be presented in the manuscript. For example, the subthemes on making amends or previous mental health experience may be sensitive if it identifies the volunteers. Instead a new set of numbers should be listed. In relation to that, authors should add at least the age and gender to the verbatim statements. Eg, Volunteer XX, M, 24 years.

Discussion:

Authors should discuss and suggest future research ideas to address some of the study limitations and advance this work. Lastly, a key concern regarding this work is the largely positive feedback received which has already been explained by the authors. It will be good to add some info on steps that were taken either before approaching the participants or during data collection to allay biased referrals or responses.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Unable to assess

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes
Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

**Quality of written English**
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

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