Reviewer's report

Title: Feasibility of Peer Support Services among People with Severe Mental Illness in China

Version: 0 Date: 18 Jun 2019

Reviewer: Bernd Puschner

Reviewer's report:

The paper reports results of a "pilot trial of effectiveness" of a peer support service in Beijing, China. The authors are to comment on successful implementation of peer support in a non-Western country. Apparently, peer support in Beijing has taken off to a good start and is alive and well.

However, the paper has a number of problems. First of all, the main purpose of a pilot study is to provide information to design the future definitive trial, e.g. to generate estimates of recruitment and retention rates, population variance, and efficacy potential. None of this has been done in this study. It even appears that no definite trial is planned. Instead, the authors use data from one time-point (follow-up) to demonstrate effectiveness, using self-developed measures whose psychometric properties have not been established.

I suggest the authors rethink objective and rationale of their study, which should probably be rephrased to feasibility study etc., and interpret results with much more care and humility, taking into account numerous limitations of their work (cross-sectional, small sample size, non-validated instruments etc.).

This means that all parts of the paper should be thoroughly revised:

1. Introduction: Provide overview of studies comparable to yours. No need to mention RCTs etc., unduly implying that your results may be of a comparable quality.

2. Methods

   * I have been wondering why authors did not at least try to get close to a longitudinal design by combining baseline and follow-up assessments. Then it would at least be a pre-post observational study.

   * Give more details on how measures were developed. As is, it just looks as if a small group of people sat together and came up with a couple of items.

   * Please use appropriate statistical analysis methods. Number of multiple univariate tests e.g. in tables 3 and 4 implies massive inflation of false positives which should be corrected (Bonferroni etc.)

3. Discussion
* Statements such as "this study examined longer-term effects" or that "effectiveness assessments were from longitudinal view" are undue because the design is cross-sectional.

* Please shorten and structure (sub-headings) the discussion.

* Refrain from unwarranted interpretations, e.g. "results demonstrated broad and multifaceted effects", "The results from our later communities verified the results from their initial counterparts, and generally showed better outcomes", "Reports of perceived benefits reflected effectiveness of the service." etc. None of this has been appropriately tested.

* To conclude that, based on these results, "The service should be included into the regular community mental healthcare system within Chinese context." seems absurd.

In general, the paper should be substantially shortened. I also recommend to enlist the aid of a native speaker to improve writing ("Effects of peer-delivered services has been demonstrated…", "As a result, when implemented peer support services in the later communities…", etc.).

References


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

No

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

No

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

No

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.

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