Reviewer’s report

Title: Supported and valued? A survey of Early Career Researchers’ experiences and perceptions of youth and adult involvement in mental health, self-harm and suicide research

Version: 0 Date: 20 Nov 2018

Reviewer: Virginia Minogue

Reviewer's report:

The article deals with an interesting and important topic, the engagement and involvement of young people. The authors chose to use the term involvement rather than PPIE and it is not clear whether they understood the distinction between involvement and engagement. I also had some concerns about the use of the term 'general public involvement' to denote adult involvement in health research. Again, I wondered if they appreciated the distinction between patient and public involvement and engagement.

The summary and background stated that the study was focusing on youth involvement in self harm and suicide research but much of the focus was on the engagement of mental health service users and research more generally. It felt that the intended focus on self harm receded into the background. I felt that a clearer focus was needed on the primary objective of the study although the survey questions suggested the purpose was more general. It was also unclear whether the young people engaged in the reference group for the symposium development had lived experience of self harm and suicidal behaviour as well as more general mental health experience. Similarly, had the group been involved in generating the research topic, the research design or anything other than the symposium development? If they were, had they been clearly told the purpose of the symposium and its relationship to the research?

It would be useful to know if the authors reflected on their own PPI and the impact it had on the study.

I didn't feel that the paper really explored what it set out to do i.e. the challenges of involvement work with young people with experience of self harm and suicidal behaviour. the risks of engaging with this group were referred to on more than one occasion but not explored in any depth nor did the researchers reflect on their own experience of engagement with this group within their own project. The literature on involving young people in co-design wasn't particularly explored. There are several other papers where young people have been involved in setting research questions and in research design. There is also literature from other fields e.g. alcohol and drugs, which may also be perceived as 'risky' areas of work, demonstrating how to engage young people in research and also setting out why conventional approaches to research and involvement may not work. Exploring the term value, which could be interpreted in different ways, and expanding on how cultural barriers such as value and power impact on involvement would strengthen the paper.
Level of interest
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An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English
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Acceptable

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