

To Disclose or not to Disclose? Peer Workers Impact on a Culture of Safe Disclosure for Mental Health Professionals with Lived Experience

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Does employing Lived Experience/Peer workers impact whether people in non-designated roles feel like they can disclose their lived experience?

Take Home Messages

- Employing Lived Experience workers did not automatically lead to mental health professionals feeling safe to share their lived experience with their colleagues
- There seem to be two different ways organisations responded. Some organisations were firmly committed to a designated Lived Experience

workforce. While other organisations developed a workplace culture that encouraged mental health professionals to disclose their lived experience.

- Organisations that promoted disclosure for mental health professionals had less understanding of Lived Experience work, and the Lived Experience workforce was struggling to gain credibility.
- Employing Lived Experience workers within organisations and promoting Lived Experience values reduced stigma.
- Whole of workforce training on Lived Experience values and that is Lived Experience-led supports a workplace culture that encourages and promotes self-disclosure in the organisation.

Aim

This paper explores the impact of the Lived Experience workforce on the disclosure of lived experience by mental health professionals to their colleagues in their workplace and strategies that encourage disclosure.

Why is this Research Important?

- Disclosure by mental health professionals to their colleagues and supervisors has generally been discouraged. Yet mental health professionals are no less likely to experience mental health challenges and it is often these experiences of mental health challenges that draw professionals to work in this field.
- Mental health stigma impacts people employed as mental health

professionals. The fear of disclosing lived experience of mental health challenges to colleagues or supervisors may prevent mental health professionals seeking help when needed.

- We know little about what is needed in creating a culture of safe disclosure and the influence of Lived Experience roles in creating a culture of disclosure.

Results

Three key focus areas were found. The main points for each are below.

Lived experience within work roles

- Mental health professionals using their lived experience
- The value of Lived Experience Work for Lived experience workers, traditional staff and people accessing services
- Universality of lived experience not just within designated roles
- Stigma associated with having a 'mental illness' and experiences of discrimination
- Lived Experience Leadership and having respected leaders in senior positions

Workplace Culture

- Safe to disclose when lived experience was valued
- Supportive workplace culture included openness and transparency by

employees and management

- Whole of workplace training on lived experience concepts that was lived experience led was helpful in building collaborative relationships and understanding
- Management commitment and championing was important in having a positive and inclusive culture for Lived Experience roles

Role Clarity

- Understanding of Lived Experience Role was important in building strong relationships between traditional staff and Lived Experience workers
- Lived Experience work is a unique role with a distinct focus and practice
- Job satisfaction for both Lived Experience and traditional roles involved feeling respected and understood and led to an appreciation of both roles and effective collaboration.

Strategies to Support Sharing of Lived Experience

- Supervisors disclosing their own Lived Experience
- A whole-of-workplace approach to stigma reduction and the promoting the value of lived experience.
- Challenging the us and them divide by training that emphasises people across diverse positions and social roles having a lived experience.
- Lived Experience workers can guide mental health professionals in the appropriate use of lived experience.

- Promoting the value of lived experience by mental health professionals and encouraging understanding of the role and value of Lived Experience work may benefit both groups.

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