

ADAPTING RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES IN SUBSTANCE USE RESEARCH DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Background:

To understand the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the well-being of people who use drugs (PWUD), hearing their stories is important: "Nothing about Us, Without Us!"

To assess their challenges during the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, 150 PWUD in Montreal were to be interviewed (Sept.-Dec. 2020). Recruitment needed adapting. Evidence shows the value of involving people with lived experience (PWLE) in substance use research.

Description of model of care/intervention:

Rapid quantitative assessment via telephone

1) Contacting PWUD from a cohort study list.

When this failed to yield recruitment objectives a **research assistant with lived experience (RAWLE) was mandated to intervene** leading to the following peer-led initiatives:

2) Tailoring recruitment products. Adding sites for passive recruitment, based on RAWLE's experiential knowledge.

3) Facilitating access with RAWLE on site with research-issued cell phone.

4) In-person interviews in community resources to reach vulnerable groups of PWUD (e.g. PWID, people who are homeless).

An ethics amendment was required to allow in-person data collection, executing sanitary equipment (EPI) protocols and training RAWLE to interview.

Effectiveness:

Four strategies were progressively combined over 15.33 weeks.

1: 6 interviews from Sept. 7-28

1 and 2: 6 interviews from Sept. 29-Nov 1

1, 2 and 3: 38 interviews from Nov. 2-24

2, 3 and 4: 77 interviews from Nov 25-Dec 18

Completed interviews = 127; Targeted N: 150. We did not reach 150 but the progress made from week 1 to 15 is significant. We increased the number of participants recruited and engaged in research in a pandemic.

Conclusion and next steps:

Involving RAWLE was the key to a twelvefold increase in weekly targets, contributing to the evidence supporting the added value of PWLE in substance use research. Standardizing the inclusion of research assistance with lived experience in recruitment, community liaison and other aspects of research is necessary.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

In accordance with the Guidelines International Network's Principles for Disclosure of Interests and Management of Conflicts, authors were asked to disclose all sources and amounts of direct and indirect (i.e. research support) remuneration from industry, for-profit enterprises, and other entities that could potentially introduce real or perceived risk of bias. On review, no indirect or direct conflicts of interest were identified.

Biography of presenter:

Isabelle Boisvert works as a research and community liaison assistant in Montreal (CRCHUM/CRISM). For several years, she struggled with addiction. She was presented an employment opportunity and hired in June 2020 and contributes her lived experience and knowledge of services for people who use drugs (PWUD) to research projects.