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Issues in recruiting male participants for interview in a sensitive subject

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1. Introduction

The aim of this study was to examine the lives of older involuntarily childless (IvC) men. Research in the field of older IvC men is important, not only because of an increasingly ageing population and a declining fertility rate (Dykstra 2009), but also because of the lack of research material on men as they age (Dykstra and Keizer, 2009). Divorced and widowed childless men show higher rates of depression than same status women (Zhang and Hayward, 2001). Older childless men have smaller social networks and are poorer in terms of health, diet, self-care, and wellbeing than those married with children (Dykstra and Keizer, 2009).

2. Lacunae

Men are missing from both childlessness and ageing research. Childlessness is typically divided into two types 'voluntary' and 'involuntary.' Most research focuses on the latter and is based on those in pre, participating in, or post, infertility treatment. Men are generally excluded from this research (Dykstra and Keizer 2009). Most gerontological research has focussed on older women, as they lived longer, had high chronic co-morbidities, received more state benefits, and occupied the majority of the home care sector (Arber et al, 2003; Arber, 2004). Financial research has focused on differences in women's marital status (Arber, 2004).

3. Why hard to reach?

This group is hard to reach because:

- Sensitive topic
- Men's fertility intentions and history is not recorded
- Childlessness viewed as a deep personal and social loss and generally associated with women.
- Men castigated as 'not interested' by researchers
- I am not an insider to any group such as health and care services or any charity

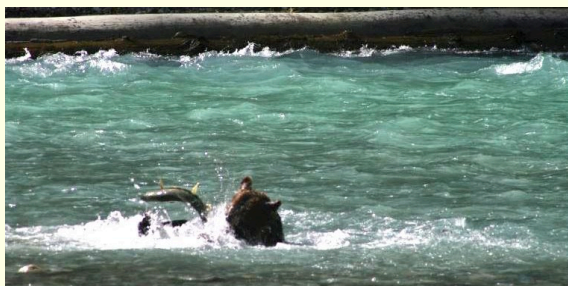


Figure 1 : 'Missing the fish': my feelings during initial recruitment.

04/2012 Participant recruitment.
Spoke to 5 older people at Woodhouse Park Community Centre (3 females, 2 males) they look leaflets but all had kids.
Spoke to workers at 'A grand day out' initiative at Wythenshawe Forum (for the over 55's) left leaflets & flyers. No suitable folk there.
Flyer put up by Forum building manager, he very keen on study.
Placed flyers in the Forum's Dr & community health services waiting area.
Advert in The Oldie appeared.
08 April
Contacted Manchester University Morgan Centre, re use of distribution lists. Not possible.
Contacted Manchester Allotment's
Contacted Manchester Social Services
Contacted Men Matter Appeal: local charity focusing on men's health esp., prostate cancer
Contacted by a member of Hyde Rotary with suggestions for participants.
Email Participant (PT) contact: sent leaflet & information sheet
09 April
Contacted S. B. (consultant urologist) he replied and will pass on details of the study. Contacted ICA-UK a charity that promotes training in local charities. Contacted local agencies for the homeless and vulnerable: Bazzaabus, Mustard tree, Booth Centre (Replied: cannot cater for research studies)
Contacted local social housing agencies: Methodist Housing Association, Anchor Housing, Northern Counties, Co-operative Housing, Salvation Army
09 April
Contacted Shelter, Manchester Ramblers, Giddylimits on-line magazine for the 50+
10th April:
Delivered leaflets to hairdressers in Northenden.
Placed advert in The Sentinel
Enquired re advert in M/Cr Evening News
Contacted Hyde Patients Group Practice
Flyers in Writington Golf Club, Sale Moor Conservative Club, Sale Moor Cricket, Hockey & Tennis Club, Sale working Men's Club, Sale Leisure Centre, Timperley Sports Club, Leaflets and flyers at YMCA in Manchester

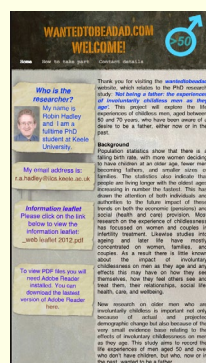


Figure 2 : Research diary extract of the recruitment methods undertaken.

Figure 3: The study's website

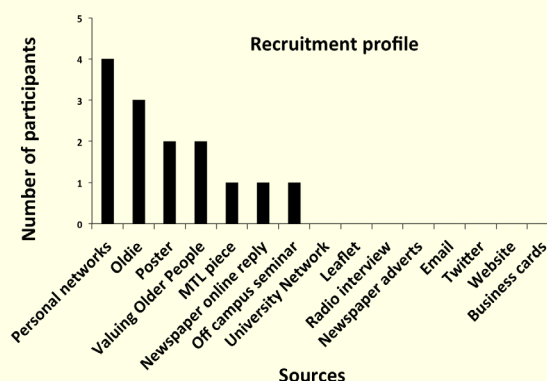


Table 1 : The successful recruitment strategies



Figure 4: Example of a recruitment 'tweet'

Male volunteers, aged between 50 and 70 years, are needed to participate in a research study. Researcher wants to talk with childless men who wanted to be a father.

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website: www.wantedtobeadad.com:
Tel: 0784 217 9785 (study-only mobile)

Figure 5: Advert in the 'Oldie'

4. Initial recruitment method

Initial recruitment methods included:

- Snowball sampling: recommended method for hard-to-reach groups.
- 3rd party contacts of personal and university networks, friends, partners, colleagues.
- Method used: email, letters, leaflets posters, strategic organisations: AgeUK; BJF; U3A (local & national), VOP (M/cr), More-To-Life, MENSFE.
- Local leafleting: café's, GP surgeries, shops, theatres etc.,

Problem 1: No respondents.

Problem 2: Recruiters reported difficulty in broaching such a sensitive subject.

5. Solution

Feeling of missing the fish (Fig., 1).

Reviewed Initial progress with supervisors:

- Listened to critical feedback.
- Reviewed recruitment material.
- Broadened approach to be more personal and direct: face-to-face (Fig., 2)
- Increase social media profile: set up website and linked to twitter (Figs., 3 and 4).
- Interviewed on local radio.
- Advertised in the 'Oldie' and local newspapers (Fig., 5).
- Wrote piece for More-To-Life newsletter.
- Recruitment strategies (Table 1).

6. Conclusion

The final sample consisted of:

- 14 men aged between 49 -82 years.
- 13 of the participants were White-British, one Australian
- Two Non-heterosexual and 12 heterosexual
- 13 participants were interviewed twice. One refused the second interview. 11 men interviewed face-to-face, 1 Skype, 1 email, and 1 telephone
- Interviews lasted from 1hr 57 mins., to 7hrs 58minutes