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Recruiting difficult to reach participants

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Workshop Overview

* Summary of our experiences of researching difficult-to reach populations

* Open discussion

* Tips for recruiting difficult to reach populations

Study Population – Childless Men

- Childlessness is typically divided into two types 'voluntary' and 'involuntary.'

- The majority of research focuses on 'involuntary' as it is based on those pre, participating in, or post infertility treatment.

- 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 2004, Arber et al, 2003).

- Research on pensions & income have focused on the differences in women's marital status (Arber, 2004).

What makes this group hard to reach?

* Sensitive topic.

* Men's fertility intentions and history tends not to be recorded.

* Not becoming a father may be seen as a loss and not revealed.

* Men castigated as 'not interested' by infertility researchers (Lloyd, 1996).

* I am not an 'insider' to any organisations such as the social services, charity, or health service.

Study Population: Community Pharmacists

* Frequently described as most accessible health professionals in the UK.

* Community pharmacy usage is high – UK survey found each adult makes an average of 12 visits a year (Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, 1996).

* Employed by community pharmacies (private businesses) which act as contractors to the publicly funded National Health Service (NHS).

* Research tends to focus on patients as source of variance in outcome –less research re: pharmacist behaviour.

What makes this group hard to reach?

* Busy health professionals.

* Many multiple and supermarket pharmacies have a 'no research policy'.

* Researchers can be asked to pay cost of locum to cover time pharmacist participates in research (expensive!).

* I'm not a pharmacist = harder to network.

* The Royal Pharmaceutical Society(RPS) is a professional body for pharmacists and pharmacy. Membership is optional therefore the RPS appear not keen to distribute details of research studies to members/provide researchers with members' contact details.

Recruitment Methods - Robin

* Snowball sampling: Invite personal and professional networks to participate, recruit, or recommend others. Seen as one of the best ways of accessing hidden populations.

* Third party contacts of personal networks (colleagues, friends, partners) reported as an effective method of recruiting male participants (Butera, 2006; Oliffe and Mróz, 2005).

* Methods used: Letters (mainly email), leaflets, posters, adverts in specialist magazine, local papers, joining activities, dropping in on events, cold calling agencies.

Initial Strategy

Launched 6th January 2012

* University network: Email, leaflets, flyers.

* Personal network: Email, leaflets, flyers.

* Strategic organisations: Age UK (local & national), Age concern (locally), Beth Johnson Foundation (refused), U3A (locally refused, no response nationally). UK Infertility Network, Mensfe (refused). Valuing Older People (*M/cr*).

* Local area: Leafleting café's, theatre's, GP's surgeries etc.

* Only one respondent after 6 weeks (withdrew).

Evaluating the Method - Robin

* Reviewed progress with supervisors: looked at feedback from 'critical friends,' colleagues, friends, and respondents.
* Broaden the approach to be more personal and direct.
* Increase face to face contact.
* Increase social media presence: Twitter
* Approached local radio and was interviewed.
* Set up website 'wantedtobeadad.com' as 'shop window.' Average 50 hits per month - peaked when went on twitter.
* Adverts placed in 'The Oldie' and later in the Manchester Evening News, The Sentinel, the West Midlands Metro.
* Wrote a piece for MTL newsletter.

Power in the Material

* Nunkoosing (2005, p.699) suggests power starts at 'the seeking of consent.'

* Power is situated in the symbols (e.g. the Keele icon) and text, and how they are presented & displayed.

* The interplay of power with a participant starts when they become aware of your research.

* Acting on feedback: Adjusted criteria wording from

  **'never been in a father role'** to _**'not presently'**_

  on information sheet, leaflets, posters, website.

* Later material included a photo-portrait.

Leaflet design adaptions

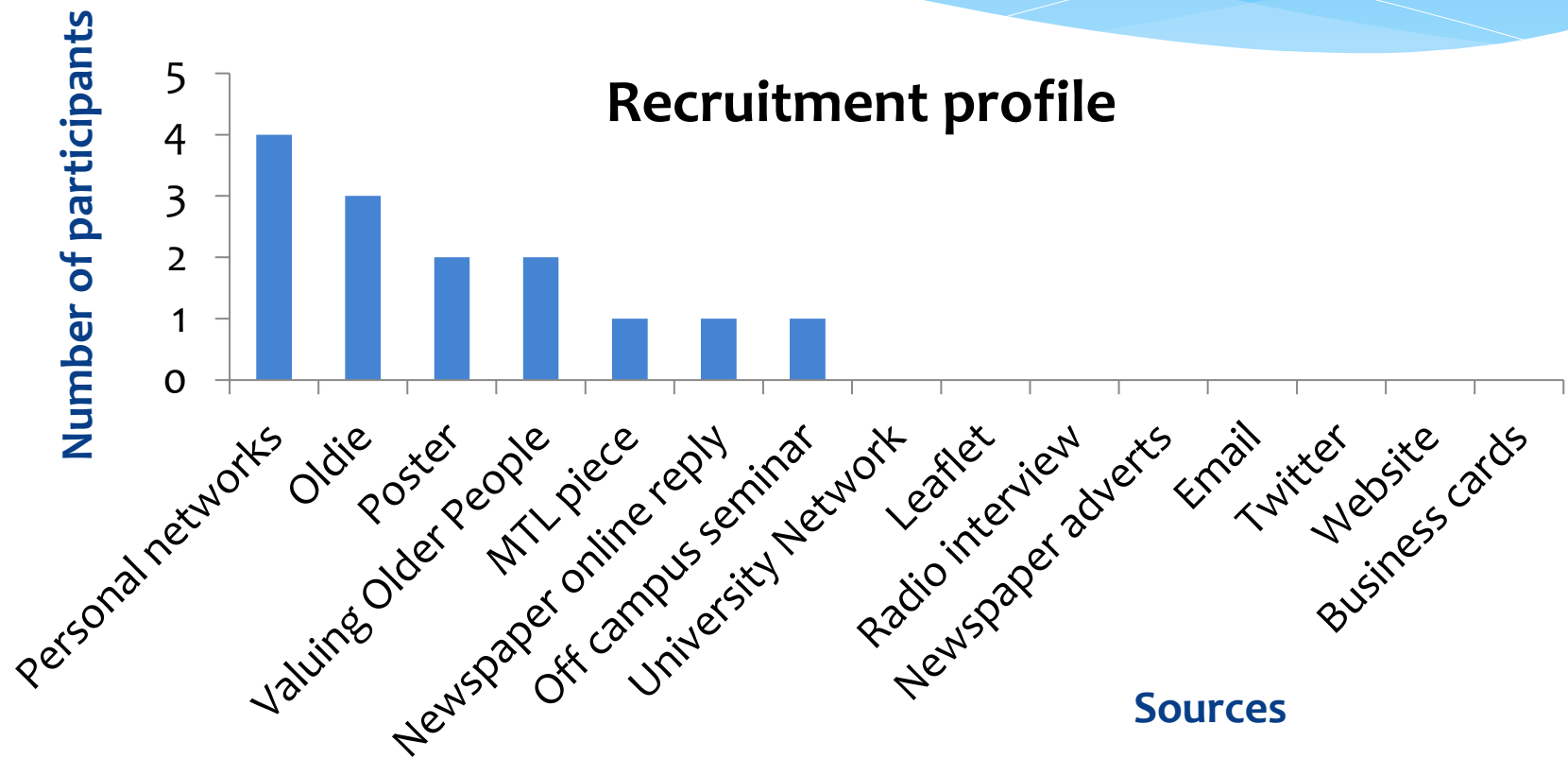Jan 2012

May 2012

Recruitment Methods - Kirsty

<u>Initial Strategy</u>

* Presented study at local pharmacy CPD meeting to raise awareness of study.

* Handed out flyers at local pharmacy CPD meeting.

* Word-of-mouth &snowballing – one of the pharmacists at the CPD meeting emailed all of his contacts, another PhD student emailed her pharmacist friends.

* Use of supervisor's contacts.

Evaluating the Method - Kirsty

* Initial strategy resulted in 5 participants.

* Reviewed with supervisors and wrote to 100+ pharmacies in Midlands informing them of the study. Followed up with phone call week later.

* Offered choice of phone or face-to-face interview.

What Worked? - Robin

Recruitment profile

Number of participants (y-axis: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)

Sources (x-axis): Personal networks, Oldie, Poster, Valuing Older People, MTL piece, Newspaper online reply, Off campus seminar, University Network, Leaflet, Radio interview, Newspaper adverts, Email, Twitter, Website, Business cards

What worked? - Kirsty

* Writing to pharmacies and follow- up phone call – personal approach, could answer questions about study, gained feedback that phone interviews were more feasible.

* Offering to travel to participant to conduct the interview.

* Hard work and perseverance – took a long time to get 15 participants!

What didn't work? - Robin

Snowball & Sensitive Research

* Participant's found it hard to broach the subject with others.
* Third party recruitment – unknown dynamic between the recruiter & participant.

What didn't work? -Kirsty

* Presenting at event/handing out flyers with study info + my contact details where onus was on participant to contact me (nobody did!)

Discussion Points

* *What are your thoughts on how we recruited? Do you have any other ideas for how we could have done it?*

* *Has anyone tried something they thought would work and it really didn't, or been surprised at what has worked?*

* *What do you need to consider when selecting your population? How does the difficulty of recruiting affect your decision, and how does this affect the quality/impact of the research?*

* *Is cost an issue?*

Top Tips!

* Be realistic – allow time for recruitment and anticipate difficulties.

* Plan ahead – have <u>multiple</u> recruitment strategies in mind and put them all through ethical approval in case you need to use them

* Be resilient and persevere – if this population is under-researched, you could make a difference. Plus, your publications will be well-cited!

* Difficulty recruiting populations for research can be an important finding in itself.

Top tips 2!

* Ask colleagues and other researchers in your field what strategies they've used that have/haven't been successful.

* Think about barriers to participation and how to minimise them (e.g. can you go to interview participant in their own home, in their workplace etc.).

* Make use of social media if appropriate.