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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 adaptations

Jan 2012



**Male volunteers needed
for a research study**



An invitation to take part in a research project about men who wanted to be a father and who are aged between 50 and 70 years old.

May 2012



**Have you wanted
to be a dad?**



**Volunteers are needed
for a research study**

**Men, aged between 50 and 70
years, are needed to take part
in a study recording the
experiences of men who have
wanted to become a dad.**

Recruitment Methods - Kirsty

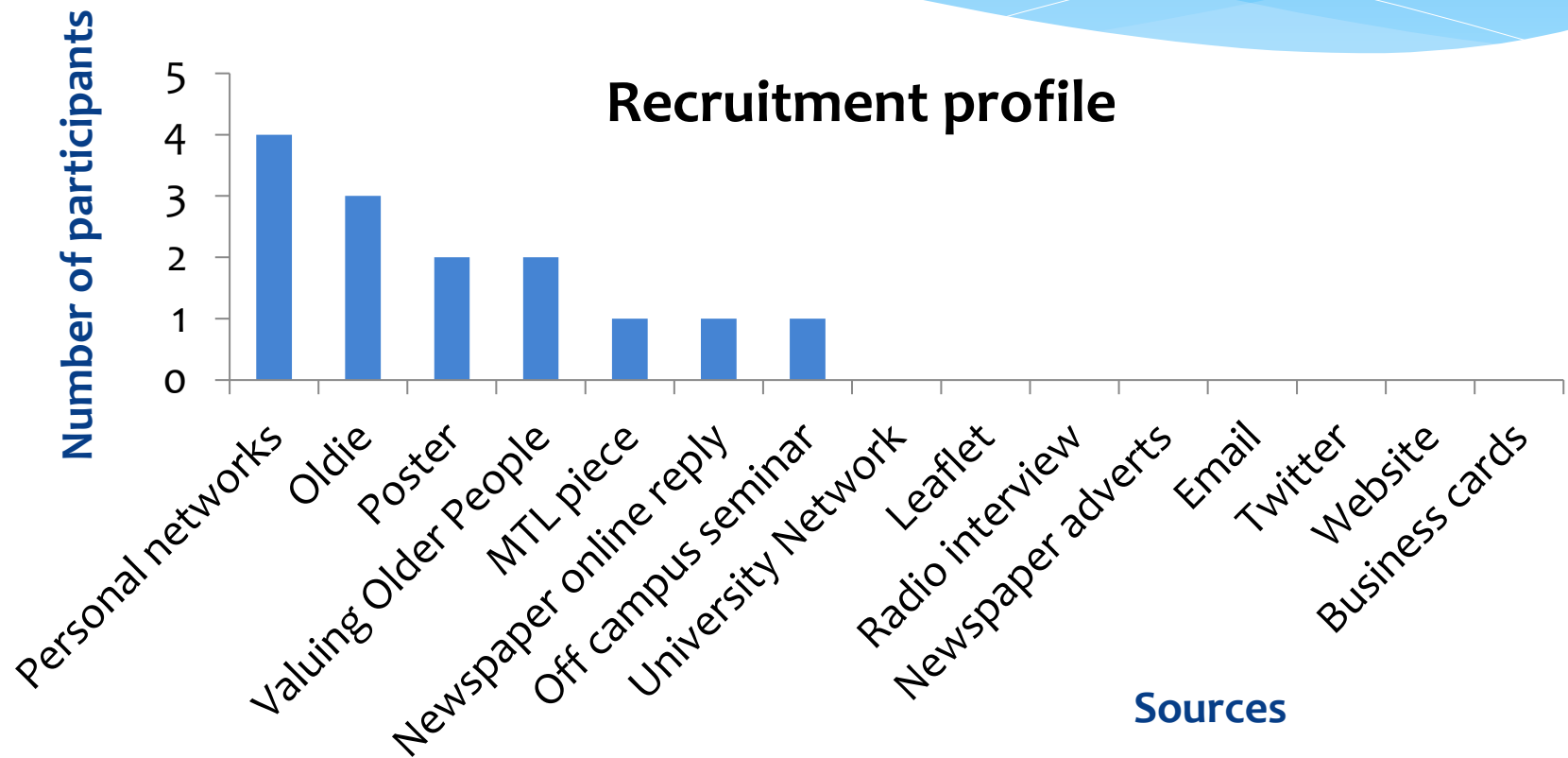
Initial Strategy

- * 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



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 multiple 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.