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SAGE Research Methods: Doing Research Online

Learning from adapting an established face-to-face peer research approach to remote delivery during the Covid-19 pandemic.

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Abstract

This case study describes how an established peer research approach was adapted from face-to-face to remote delivery in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. It will introduce the benefits and challenges of peer research in general and how this translates to the virtual domain. We will highlight strengths of a remote approach as well as reflecting on how to compensate for key components of participatory work which usually require the academic researcher to be physically present in the area. The peer research project discussed here was part of an evaluation of a national empowerment programme in areas experiencing disadvantage. In two previous rounds of peer research, peer researchers took part in two days of face-to-face training and a one-day workshop to analyse the data. This project involved peer researchers exploring residents' experiences of 'gatekeepers' in their community ('gatekeepers' were defined as *anyone who makes decisions on whether others can access services, support or funding*). Training, support, data collection, and analysis had to be adapted to be remote, with specific attention to building trust, tailoring content for shorter online training, and the ethics of a) whether it was appropriate to carry out research at all during the pandemic and b) how to prioritise the safety and wellbeing of the peer researchers and research participants. This case study is a collaboration between the academic researcher and community worker involved in the project and serves as a means of reflecting on the process of participatory research and to further build on the partnership.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this guide, students should be able to:

- Understand some key considerations in adapting peer research training and support from face-to-face to online.
- Describe barriers to accessing remote training and support, and limitations and benefits of working in this way.
- Reflect on the challenges of building rapport and trust with peer researchers without meeting face-to-face.
- Identify the key strengths brought to the collaboration by the local research site and the university research team.
- Recognise the impact peer research can have on peer researchers and their local area.

Project Overview and Context

The peer research project discussed in this case study was part of an evaluation of a national programme supporting people in areas experiencing high levels of disadvantage. The programme aimed to increase social connections, knowledge, skills, and influence through resident-led activities and action, which would ultimately increase individuals' control over their lives and improve health and wellbeing (Local Conversations Evaluation Report, 2020). The programme initially had 23 sites across Great Britain and at each site a local organisation engaged and supported local residents. In depth case study research was undertaken at 5 sites, which included peer research. Peer research was consistent with the empowerment objective of the overall programme through providing training for residents and valuing local knowledge (South et al, 2019). At each case study site, an academic researcher worked closely with the local organisation's lead project worker and 3-10 local residents to develop and carry out the peer research.

This case study will examine a peer research project at one specific site which was newly selected for this stream of work in 2020 and therefore the community worker (the project lead) and local residents had no prior relationship with the academic evaluation team. Table 1 shows the terms which will be used in this case study to describe the different people involved.

Table 1

Term used in Case Study	Definition
Peer researcher	A community member who was trained to carry out research with their peers as participants.
Participant	Someone who takes part in research, in this case, by being interviewed by a peer researcher.
Community worker	The local project lead (and experienced community development worker) for one specific site in the national programme which was being evaluated.
Community organisation	A local charity organisation at this one site in Wales which engaged and supported local residents and hosted the community worker as part of the overall programme.
Academic researcher	A researcher employed by a university in England who provided research expertise and support to the peer researchers to develop and carry out a piece of research.

Before considering how to adapt peer research to remote delivery, it's useful to review some of the main benefits and challenges associated with this type of research in general. Israel et al (1998) summarise the main benefits of Community-Based Participatory Research, including peer research, stating that it:

- Produces relevant, useful data which can be used by the community
- Includes people with diverse skills, knowledge and lived experience
- Can build relationships and overcome community distrust of research
- Provides funding, training and new opportunities for community researchers

- Recognises that "knowledge is power" and can be used to influence those in authority, which can especially benefit marginalised communities
- Prevents context stripping
- Can improve community health and wellbeing

Key challenges associated with peer research (Israel et al, 1998) are:

- Building trust in communities that have been exploited in the past
- Sharing power and control
- Use of language
- Different values, beliefs and preconceptions
- Time – it is a big commitment, how is time spent on the project rewarded?
- Representation – how is it decided who is representing the community?
- Validity, reliability, and objectivity of the research

These challenges will be discussed further in the following sections in the context of this project.

Section summary

- *Peer research was undertaken as part of the evaluation of a programme seeking to empower residents in areas experiencing high levels of disadvantage.*
- *This project had to be delivered remotely due to the Covid-19 pandemic.*
- *Community-Based Participatory Research can offer a range of benefits to a community but there are also a number of challenges associated with it. This case study will explore how working online affected these benefits and challenges*.

Research Design

Includes an investigation into how you designed your study, taking into account any fundamental decisions you had to make. ***This section should emphasize the aspects of the research project – specific methods or challenges - that you will focus on in this case study****. You should ensure that you define and explain any key terms for student readers.*

The peer research stream of the evaluation had been designed to include two days of face-to-face training from an academic researcher at each local site, followed by a period of data collection by the peer researchers with support over email/phone, and then a one-day in-person workshop to analyse the data together. The academic researcher then took the lead on writing a summary report with ongoing feedback and final sign-off from the peer researchers.

The Covid-19 pandemic meant that travel and in person training were out of the question – both because of university regulations on staff field work and restrictions in place from the UK and Welsh governments. Lockdowns took place in England and Wales at different times, further complicating matters. For everyone's safety, if the research was to go ahead, much of it would have to be online.

To make the best use of time in online training, it was decided that some preparatory discussions would take place between the local community worker and residents before the first training session. The community worker would introduce the idea of peer research and interested individuals could choose to take part. The peer researchers would choose a research area they would like to investigate and their preferred research method to collect data. A training session was planned using Microsoft Teams with ongoing support on offer over email/phone/social media chat.

A 2-hour online training session was designed which covered:

- Community research – what is it and why do it?
- The topic
- How do we want to do the research?
- Ethics: doing the right thing
- Interview skills
- Next steps

Interview skills included training on doing interviews over the phone or Zoom and how this is different from being in the same room as the participant. The section on ethics included discussions on confidentiality and anonymity; how to collect data in a way that protected the safety, dignity and wellbeing of researchers and participants; as well as the practicalities of storing data.

Ethical approval was sought through the university ethical review process and covered both the researchers and the participants. Key elements were that peer researchers would receive training in research methods including on boundaries, confidentiality, safety, safeguarding, data protection and ethical issues. They would have clear guidance on what to do if they were concerned about the safety or well-being of those they conducted research with. They would be able to contact one of the research team for support or advice if needed throughout the research period.

Section summary

- *The peer research training was reduced significantly from 2 days to 2 hours.*
- *Discussions on research topic and research methods that previously formed part of the training took place in advance with support from the community worker.*
- *The training had a strong emphasis on ethics and included confidentiality and anonymity; protecting the safety, dignity and wellbeing of researchers and participants; and how to store data.*

Research Practicalities

The decision to go ahead with the research was not taken lightly. Kara (2020) emphasises that it is only ethical to carry out research that really needs to be done when we are 'in the middle of a global collective trauma' and methods used should not require excessive input from participants (or researchers) who are likely to be experiencing high levels of stress and uncertainty. It was discussed with the local community worker who presented the option of being involved to residents, making it clear that participation was voluntary. The decision was taken by the

residents to do the research because it was the first chance they had been offered to investigate something that was a major issue for them and also, they were keen to take part to relieve the boredom and isolation they were experiencing as a result of the pandemic. It was important to be even more flexible than in general participatory research and the focus was very much on making it a positive experience for the peer researchers and ensuring the research was carried out safely and ethically, as opposed to being on quantity of data collected.

Recruitment and preparation for the project

The first step was to promote the potential project to the community, and with very limited in-person meetings, the best way to do this was online. The community worker at the local site laid the foundations for the research by publicising the opportunity through social media and email. He posted an invitation to take part on several community-wide Facebook groups which reach thousands of community members. He also sent the invitation to a large mailing list of residents and practitioners. It was discussed further at a face-to-face steering group meeting for the residents involved in the programme and the attendees were invited to take part.

Training

It was decided to deliver the training over a video conferencing platform; the university provides staff with access to Microsoft Teams and Skype for Business and the university team had experience training people who were unfamiliar with using this technology. The intention was to send a link to each peer researcher and the community development worker so that everyone could access individually.

Limitations were considered at this point. The training would have to be shorter because it is more tiring to concentrate on a screen for long periods of time (Bailenson, 2021) and it cannot be broken up as easily with activities, movement and refreshments as an in-person session (Neilson, 2020). A shorter session would have to be much more focused on specific areas of interest rather than a wider introduction to research, research methods and discussion about priorities and research questions. The research question and method had been chosen in groups prior to the training so that the session could be targeted on refining the question, using the chosen research method, ethics and next steps. The site had been chosen to take part in the funded programme because the area was experiencing high levels of deprivation. Economically inactive working age adults are less likely to be internet users than those in employment (ONS, 2019), so there was a higher probability that residents would need additional support with technology. The economic challenges the residents face in general (often exacerbated by the pandemic) would also affect their ability to afford devices and data/internet access.

The primary anticipated benefits of a remote approach were that it would allow the project to go ahead safely and it could potentially allow people to access the work who wouldn't usually be able to attend in person. In some studies, technology has been found to support the empowerment of marginalised communities, including those with past issues that had led to distrust of academic researchers (Fielding et al, 2017:13). It was hoped that the fact that online sessions are shorter and more flexible would mean that they would fit in with people's lives more easily and would be less of a burden on their time.

One major concern was how to build rapport and trust with peer researchers without meeting face-to-face. The academic researcher was keen to offer as many means of communicating as possible (phone calls, emails, Facebook chat) so that peer researchers could keep in touch in a way they felt comfortable with. The peer researchers were also going to take the lead on how to collect their data, how they wanted to meet and what they wanted to do with the research; the importance of flexibility from the academic researcher's side was more important than ever. The community worker was an important link, vouching for the credibility and integrity of the academic researcher.

The peer researchers were keen to do interviews so learnt about informed consent, right to withdraw, anonymity and confidentiality. The peer researchers were asked to prepare how they would handle situations where people became distressed or disclosed personal problems, for example, around mental health. The community centre had a range of support services and the community worker was well-placed to signpost people to get them the help they needed, so the peer researchers had a plan to direct participants to the community worker with the participant's consent.

Data collection and analysis

Each peer researcher was going to interview other members of their community using a structured interview which had five questions. In conversations about collecting and storing data, the peer researchers came to the conclusion that they would not be comfortable audio recording the interviews, partially because of technological issues, but mainly because they could not guarantee it would be securely stored and shared. The group decided to make notes during interviews. The academic researcher used SNAP surveys to create a link where they could input their notes for each of their five questions into open text boxes. This meant that the data was securely stored and the academic researcher had direct access to it for analysis.
In the context of further lockdowns and ongoing challenges with IT access, the thematic analysis on the 10 completed interviews was done by the academic researcher and summarised in a short report. The report was shared with the group and they gave comments and made suggestions for changes.

A key challenge in peer research, as noted earlier, is time. If the input of peer researchers is truly valued, then we believe they should be paid (at least) the Living Wage in recognition of their time and skills: £9.50 outside of London (Living Wage Foundation, 2021). The researchers were paid £10 per hour for the hours they spent in training, collecting data and contributing to the analysis and write up. They received payment in the form of high street vouchers which can be used at a wide range of stores, including some supermarkets. This was believed to be the best way to make the payment from a distance via the post so that they didn't need to provide bank details.

Section summary

- *The ethics of carrying out the research in a pandemic were carefully considered. Participation was voluntary and the research design aimed to reduce the burden on those involved as well as compensating researchers financially for their time.*
- *Social media was the best way to reach community members, but it was anticipated they would experience a number of barriers to participation due to access to technology.*
- *It was hoped that remote delivery could support empowerment and that the flexibility would allow people to participate who would otherwise be excluded*.

Method in Action

The fact that they had decided the question and methods before the training meant that there was limited influence from the academic researcher, more control and power were in their hands. The topic had the potential to be a controversial one, however, and the research questions were initially quite leading, asking participants to share bad experiences of community gatekeepers. Some of these issues could be ironed out with emails and phone calls with peer researchers before the training and the training then further underlined the neutral role of the researcher. The peer researchers were drawn to collecting data using interviews because the relational approach is part of how residents are building meaningful connections, which is imperative in the central programme aiming to address the social determinants of health. It would have been seen as unforgiveable not to speak to fellow residents in person, and Covid simultaneously made this more difficult and more necessary. Social isolation was having a significant detrimental impact on many people and the peer researchers felt that this project offered a legitimate opportunity to reconnect with people.
The five peer researchers who decided to take part already knew each other from being involved with the local organisation. This was beneficial, particularly in this process of piloting training online, because it is more challenging to build those relationships when the facilitator isn't physically present. The group could speak openly and provide support both relating to the research but also more generally, with each other's personal situations.

Digital exclusion and technological challenges

It soon became apparent that barriers to accessing online training were more difficult to overcome than anticipated. The main challenges encountered were:

- Lack of access to appropriate devices e.g. laptops, tablets
- Limited IT skills to use devices to attend remote sessions
- Low confidence to access training in this way
- Insufficient data/no internet access at home
- Specific Learning Differences (SpLD)
- A lack of suitable learning/working environments at home

A social learning setting which supported the group with all of the issues listed above was essential and this allowed the community worker to focus on one piece of technology to allow everyone to join.

When Wales came out of lockdown in November 2020, it was permitted for groups to meet indoors as long as social distancing was in place. The community worker organised a room at the community centre that could accommodate the 5 peer researchers and could provide a laptop and screen for the academic researcher to attend virtually. This also meant refreshments could be provided in the form of pre-packed afternoon tea boxes delivered from a supermarket chain. The group being together in one place gave a morale boost and the technical support was supplied by the community worker. Even with his expertise, Teams crashed the laptop and after a short

delay, we switched to Skype for Business to run the session after communicating via email and phone calls to find a solution (the moral of the story is always have a back-up or two!). During the delay the group could chat amongst themselves and were spared the stress of trying to access the meeting in isolation.

Once it began, the training session was full of lively discussion; the peer researchers were very engaged with the topic and keen to get started. It was important the research question was relevant and something they felt strongly about to keep up the momentum of the work when the training and support were virtual.

One unintended consequence of the videocall being shown on a big screen is that the academic researcher was quite a large presence in the room which was actually useful in setting the roles for the session; the community worker has found that sitting amongst the group in sessions he is facilitating usually means it is difficult to progress conversations and things go off track. The visibly larger presence helped to bring the group back to the purpose of the meeting if they started to digress because their attention was drawn to the screen. The community worker felt that otherwise, they might have 'lost the room' because the trainer is at a disadvantage from not being with the group, but the presence could be large whilst also friendly and in no way domineering or aggressive. At times the group went on a tangent when someone felt very passionate about an issue which was raised, but one member of the group took a lead on managing the group to bring them back on course, which was helpful on a practical level but also reenforced the redistribution of power because the academic researcher was not taking charge of the session. The remote role of facilitator also has to be more animated than normal to overcome the loss of subtle communication through body language and to keep up the energy in the room.

Data collection and support

The academic researcher made it clear that university policy at the time did not allow fieldwork and so the peer researchers were not being asked to collect data in person. The group, because of key barriers to remote work mentioned above and a preference for talking face-to-face, felt very strongly that they wanted to do interviews in person. The academic researcher was uncomfortable with this and concerned about health risks but the group asserted themselves and stressed that as adults, they could make that decision themselves. They did intend to adhere to public health guidance, including maintaining social distance. Ultimately, there was a mix of face-to-face and telephone interviews. This was one notable area where the academic researcher relinquished control over the project, respecting the peer researchers' right and ability to make decisions, whilst also supporting the group to have a detailed plan for how to ensure everyone's safety.

Ongoing support was provided through the community worker and over email, telephone and Facebook messenger from the academic researcher. One member of the group was happy to use email, two had phone calls with the academic researcher in the planning and feedback stages of the project, and all of the group used Facebook messenger as their preferred means of contact. The academic researcher had a designated Facebook account used only for work purposes to maintain professional boundaries. The one-to-one contact allowed quieter members of the group to have their voice heard and contribute to the work. Communication between the academic researcher and community worker was more frequent than in previous projects, and conversations were more in depth; this was partly influenced by the pandemic and the need to

adapt to restrictions and constantly reflect on ethical issues, but also because there had been more limited contact between the academic researcher and the peer researchers, so context and background was missing.

The challenges of IT access, IT literacy and learning difficulties affected data collection, data entry and provision of support, as well as the initial training. The community worker provided a significant level of practical support and data input was supported by another member of staff from the local organisation when peer researchers were not able to do it themselves. The neurodiversity in the group meant that this extra, specialised support provided at the local level was particularly important and also involved longer group discussion time, and support with documentation and providing comments on the report.

Writing up the research

When the peer researchers received the first draft of the findings report, they had a number of suggestions of more information to answer the research question and wished to include their own experience and opinions, the line between researcher and participant was blurred because the researchers wanted to combine their responses with the data that had been collected from their peers. To recognise community knowledge and resolve this situation, the information was included but it was clearly stated where it came from i.e. a peer researcher as opposed to a participant. One peer researcher submitted his own reflections on the topic through the link for interview data. Again, the academic researcher did not want to exclude this input but also felt it was not appropriate to combine with the other interview data, so this was included as a case study to give more background about why the research question was chosen and why it was of such importance to the peer researchers. The online submission of data worked well in many respects (security and convenience) but at times, it was unclear whether the data were from participants or peer researcher reflections. Regular communication helped to clarify this.

Another issue arose in feedback on the report: the academic researcher had been diplomatic in some descriptions and the group were keen for the strength of feeling, and in some cases anger, to come through. This exposed a negative bias towards gatekeepers but also showed that they were confident in asserting themselves over email, phone calls and in Facebook chats so that the research output reflected their work. Some negotiation followed and a compromise was reached with quotes doing the talking for some stronger criticisms of local gatekeepers, balanced with an objective tone and recommendations for moving forward. There was also a blurring of lines between activism and research leading to open conversations about the importance of trying to approach research with reduced bias (or at least with an acknowledgement that we all have bias). The fact that feedback came via email and Facebook chat may have helped peer researchers to be honest and raise issues that would have been more difficult to do in a group setting.

One serious concern going into this work was how to build close, trusting relationships from a distance that underpin any community-based participatory research. The community worker was a long-standing, trusted advocate for the peer researchers and this helped the group to accept and welcome the academic researcher into their project. The conversations were open and frank, creating a positive working group. The group felt supported, in control and in a position to explore an issue they had had for years but with no platform to draw attention to it. They felt they had a voice and they felt valued (which the community worker stresses is very rare!). The fact that the academic researcher was not physically present allowed the peer researchers to feel real

ownership of their research so, in this instance, reducing the power imbalance between the academic and peer researchers was actually less of an issue than it is offline.

The community organisation who employ the community worker and/or community worker also had the potential to use their power and ironically be a gatekeeper by preventing or influencing the work, but they have strong leaders in place who work according to principles of empowerment and supporting marginalised groups to be heard – even if they might not always like some of the things they say! As mentioned above, the findings from the research were critical of community gatekeepers who have the power to decide who can access services, support or funding and the organisation supporting the work is a local charity which provides support and funding.
The community organisation felt that firstly, the research findings would contribute to their work on improving health and wellbeing and secondly, it would be a great opportunity for residents to be involved in digital learning. It would have been difficult for the academic researcher to manage this situation from afar so again, ongoing, regular dialogue ensured that the partners in the work shared the same values and commitment to the process. In future remote projects, it is important that the academic researcher recognises the local power dynamics and potential for influence or even censorship in community research.

Future research

For future projects, there is the potential to have a more blended approach to allow the peer researchers to feel ownership over their project with the academic researcher at a distance. There would need be additional IT training for community members, and provision of devices and internet access. Even in projects that are not remote, it would be beneficial for more decisions to be made in the community before the peer research training.
One area where the online approach worked less well was involving peer researchers in every stage of the research, particularly analysis. This was not possible with the pressures we were experiencing at the time; the project was rapidly adapted to being remote but with more preparation, it would be possible to have a joint analysis session. Participatory data analysis with marginalised groups is often minimal (or avoided altogether) but this process plays a large part in supporting peer researchers to make sense of their research findings and their relevance to the community; this can lay the foundation for social action (Warwick-Booth et al, 2021). Nind (2011) provides further insight into why this stage of research often excludes peer researchers as well as exploring the importance of participation. Moving this online might look quite different to the suggested approaches and require creativity and the use of everything available from projector screens in community centres to Facebook chat.

Section summary

- *The challenges of digital exclusion were even larger than anticipated and the peer researchers also needed support with learning difficulties.*
- *The academic researcher being physically distant actually supported the group to feel more ownership over the research and helped to reduce to power imbalance.*
- *Regular, open communication using Teams, email, phone calls, Facebook, helped to build relationships and deal with challenges.*
- *Future work would benefit from key decisions being made in the community before the training begins and also from involving the peer researchers in analysis.*

Practical Lessons Learned

In the process of reflecting on the project, the academic researcher and community worker identified ways of working and aspects of personality that were essential to the success of the collaboration – some of these come naturally and some with experience of working in the community. These factors are relevant to face-to-face working, but even more important with the added challenge of distance.

From the community worker's perspective, there were particular traits that the academic researcher needed to have for the project to work. He describes the academic researcher as having the right, positive demeanour to build trust with the group. From the community group's point of view, the academic researcher was experienced enough to adapt as things progressed – she didn't come across as shocked or flustered when the peer researchers challenged aspects of the work – her reaction was never 'you can't do that' but more 'if we are going to do it that way, how will it look and what do we need to think about?' This was particularly apparent in the conversations around how the peer researchers would collect data, when there was a firm push-back against collecting all of the data remotely. The academic researcher also coordinated the project, dealing with the administration and report writing.

From the academic researcher's perspective, the community worker provided an essential link to the community group. His seal of approval meant that the group were more willing to trust the stranger joining them and to be open to the new experience of researching in their community. While training, and to some extent data collection, was remote, there was a significant need for hands on local support to overcome problems and to keep up the momentum. Having a local community worker who knows the residents well was vital – he provided encouragement as well as practical support setting up meetings, printing, dropping off materials at the researchers' houses. It was clear from the start that the community worker also had a love of research and believed in its power to effect change.

The academic researcher and community worker had ongoing conversations which helped to understand context and find solutions to challenges along the way. A positive attitude and shared willingness to work around any obstacles contributed to the success of the project.
The academic researcher has to cede control even more when they are never physically present – this is not easy and is particularly challenging for less experienced researchers, earlier in their career. There will be a number of ethical issues that arise, what Banks et al refer to as the 'everyday ethics' (2013), as well as practical challenges, and the researcher needs to make a decision in the moment, this requires confidence to manage risk and to be accountable.
There were clear benefits to the peer researchers engaging in this remote work. This was the first opportunity for residents to work online in this way and for some, their first use of technology apart from their smartphone. This learning increased their confidence and they acquired transferable skills that can be used in other voluntary or paid roles.
Academics should not underestimate the challenges of digital exclusion when working in communities facing high levels of disadvantage; residents may not have access to the internet or devices, and supplying them is not enough because often people lack confidence even when they do have basic IT skills.

To do peer research in person you need to be flexible, patient, positive and to invest a great deal of time into the work. When moving the training and support online, all of this is true but even more so. We had to be more flexible, offering more means of communicating and more patient and supportive to take into account people's challenging circumstances. We also invested even more time in considering the ethics of how the research was done.

Section summary

- *Good communication, positive attitudes and experience working in the community (and using IT) helped to make the project a success.*
- *Benefits to the peer researchers included increased IT skills, confidence and other transferable skills.*
- *Facilitating peer research online needs more flexibility, more time, more communication and more attention to ethics than doing it in person.*

Conclusion

Returning to Israel et al's (1998) summary of key benefits of community-based participatory research, we found that this remote peer research project produced relevant, useful data on relationships with community gatekeepers which the peer researchers have been able to use to start a dialogue about involving people in decisions that affect them. The peer research included people with diverse skills, knowledge and lived experience, and developed positive relationships between the academic researcher and the peer researchers. The project provided funding, training, new skills and opportunities to the . researchers, whilst also giving them a constructive means of challenging power. It provided rich context for the overall evaluation research from the peer researchers lived experience; and the remote element in particular has boosted confidence and feelings of control.

Many of the challenges highlighted by Israel et al (1998) were present and some were exacerbated by the distance, but trust was built with a lot of additional support from the local community worker. Sharing power and control was actually easier because without the physical presence of the academic researcher, peer researchers felt more ownership over the project. There were interesting conversations about language, particularly about the wording of the research questions – open and frank discussions allowed the work to be successful, as well as shared values of respect. Time was a challenge because of the overall project deadlines and the covid restrictions, but a key part of valuing the peer researchers was compensating them financially for their involvement. There were definitely issues around objectivity and some lively debates on the subject because the peer researchers had had many negative experiences of gatekeepers, but the findings brought a few revelations to the researchers challenging some of their preconceptions, notably that as peer researchers they could be seen as gatekeepers themselves.

Although the decision to work remotely was not a choice, we would do it again. For other researchers interested in approaching peer research in this way, we would recommend intensive support to counter digital exclusion before beginning the research and also including team members who have experience working in a community setting.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the advantages and challenges of carrying out peer research projects?
2. What are some key considerations when delivering peer research training and support remotely?
3. What barriers might people, especially those in deprived areas, face in virtual training, support and data collection?
4. How can power be shared more equitably between academic and peer researchers?

Multiple Choice Quiz Questions

1. Why would academic researchers want to incorporate peer research into their work?
    a. It is easier if someone else does the research
    b. It takes less time than traditional approaches
    c. Peer researchers bring diverse skills and lived experience

2. How can an academic researcher build rapport with peer researchers when working remotely?
    a. By working with a trusted community advocate
    b. By sending expensive gifts
    c. By leaving the peer researchers to work independently without any involvement from the academic

3. What does an academic researcher need to have to support participatory research?
    a. A driving license and car
    b. A PhD and experience presenting at conferences
    c. A positive attitude and experience in a community setting

4. How were the peer researchers compensated for their time?
    a. They were volunteers and so did not need compensation for their time
    b. They received vouchers to the value of £10 per hour
    c. They were employed as research assistants by the university

Correct answers C, A, C, B

Web Resources

- Kara, H. (2020) Research methods to consider in a pandemic.

  https://helenkara.com/2020/05/20/research-methods-to-consider-in-a-pandemic/

- Involve – the UK's leading public participation charity

  https://www.involve.org.uk/about/about-involve

- UK Government support on remote versus face-to-face research during Covid-19

  https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/user-research/doing-user-research-during-coronavirus-covid-19-choosing-face-to-face-or-remote-research

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