Floorboards, Whitewalls and Butterflies: Ethnography of a Community Mental Health Cafe

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Abstract : Introduction: In the United Kingdom (UK), the transfer of care from the asylums to the community has meant that some people with mental health problems (MHP) may not have access to suitable or adequate statutory community mental health services (CMHS). However, in addition to statutory CMHS, there are informal CMHS that provide spaces where people with MHP can attend such as faith communities, clubhouses, user-led organisations, day centres including drop-in-centres and community hubs and community mental health cafés (CMHCs). Aim: To qualitatively understand what happens in a community mental health café in relation to the place, people and processes, from the participant's perspective. Methodology: Ethnography Methods: Data collection will be field notes from observations written as thick description and interviews with participants. Data analysis will be thematic and narrative analysis. Relevance: The study seeks to observe what happens in a user-led community mental health café and explore if it provides the services that it claims to offer. Therefore, a literature review was conducted to examine the research evidence related to informal CMHS, focusing on similarities and differences. Results indicated that informal CMHS differ with regards to why, how, who set them up and who funds them, but they are similar because people with MHP who attend them report related psychological, vocational, and social interaction benefits. In addition to the differences listed above, CMHCs differ in their adoption of the commercial café model of social space and some CMHCs claim to address needs of social isolation and loneliness which they assert are not properly addressed by statutory CMHS and some informal CMHS. Therefore, CMHCs explicitly differentiate themselves from statutory CMHS and some informal CMHS such as day centres, hospitals and social services. However, CMHCs were found to be like drop-in-centres and community hubs which are also free for MHP to attend without the need for assessments, membership or appointments. To situate community mental health café within other informal CMHS and provide a rationale for the proposed study a scoping review was conducted to determine the scope of available research evidence on CMHCs. Findings from the scoping review reflected the literature review findings with regards to the benefits of attending informal CMHCs for people with MHP. Of the ten studies included in the scoping review, seven were on CMHCs for people living with dementia and two were on CMHCs for people with a broader range of MHP. The researcher hopes that findings from the proposed PhD study will build on the existing understanding of informal CMHS, extend the research evidence on CMHCs and address any gap in the literature.

Keywords : cafe, community, ethnography, mental health

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