

Results of peer support studies found on-line and analyzed by scholars in the area of mental health. It commonly takes 20 years for research result to go from publication to practice, so BU Center for Psych Rehab is trying to speed up the process by analyzing results of studies on Peer Support and disseminating them into the mental health community nationally. They hope their results will be useful in our advocacy efforts as well as informative to Peers in the field.

*Where were studies obtained?*

On-line sources of studies (Medline, PsychInfo, Google Scholar) searched by key words (Self Help Groups, Drop-in Centers, Peer Delivered Services, etc.). 127 studies considered initially, 54 selected to rate.

*How were the studies selected?*

Rated for Rigor (how well the study was done) and Meaning (Were the question/s asked useful? Were the answers useful?) Ratings of Meaning were not used to exclude studies. The first section of the Meaning Scale rates how much consumers are involved in the research study.

Up to 78% of researchers reported that consumers were somehow involved in the study design or conduct.

*What kind of studies?*

Published in the last 20 years. Peer Support had to be defined in several ways – 6 categories of support: Peer services added, mutual support groups, drop-in centers, one-to-one service, residential services and other.

*How were the studies analyzed for information?*

Each study was scored according to the quality of the research design and to see if the research questions were of general interest. 12 Experts in the field reviewed the list of studies to ensure that no important study had been missed.

*What did the scholars find out?*

Some studies showed that engagement and retention in services is helped by having peer workers.

Peer support worked as well as traditional services in areas of: employment, perceived social support criminal justice involvement, housing stability, working alliance, service use, re-hospitalizations, quality of life or substance abuse.

There is some evidence that peer-delivered services, provided in a group context, can be effective in engaging individuals and in improving outcomes.

There were problems with people dropping out of some of the services and with the wide variation in services provided from program to program; also it was hard to tell in some cases what actual services the person received.

People who engage in peer-delivered services regularly benefit in areas of abstinence from substance abuse, stability, self-esteem, self-efficacy, empowerment, quality of life, perceived social support, satisfaction with services, medication adherence, reduced criminal justice involvement.

There is evidence that attendance in a peer-delivered program was associated with global positive changes in well-being.

The research analysts concluded that if Peer Delivered services are to be evaluated, we may need to rethink how research is done.

Research results are from the Peer Support Study Group at the Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation, Boston University. (Innovative Knowledge Dissemination & Utilization Project for Disability & Professional Stakeholder Organizations/ NIDRR Grant #H133A050006.)