



Peer Research in the UK



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Interested in finding out more about peer research? Drop the team a note at peerresearch@youngfoundation.org

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The Young Foundation's mission is to develop better connected and stronger communities across the UK. We research in and with communities to increase your understanding of community life today. We offer different methods and approaches to involve communities and grow their capacity to own and lead change. We provide tools and resources to support innovation to tackle the issues people and communities care about. We're a UKRI accredited research organisation, social investor and community practitioner.

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Introduction

About this report

This report takes an in-depth look at the use of peer research in the UK today. It aims to provide a comprehensive introduction to the methodology and advocate for its value as a legitimate and insightful research approach, with the potential to empower peer researchers.

The first section of the report defines peer research as a methodology and discusses its many advantages.

The second section of the report is based on a desk review of 48 peer research projects conducted in the UK over the last five years. The review includes projects that are planned and ongoing in addition to those that have been completed.

The third section of the report discusses challenges and questions practitioners of peer research need to address in order to move the methodology forward.

The last section addresses the current gaps in the application of peer research and suggests some future directions for the methodology.

We have included an appendix listing all the peer research projects we reviewed for this report.

What is peer research?

Peer research is a participatory research method in which people with lived experience of the issues being studied take part in directing and conducting the research¹. Like other participatory methods, peer research:

...recognises that individuals within any community being researched are themselves competent agents, capable of participating in research on a variety of levels, including as researchers (Higgins et al., 2007: 105)

It aims to move away from the 'extractive' model of social research² and to empower people to affect positive change by participating in research and in their own communities³.

Peer researchers (also referred to as 'community researchers') use their lived experience and contextual understanding of a social or geographical community to help generate information about their peers for research purposes⁴. For example, in an effort to gain better insight into the perspectives of young people, a growing number of youth studies have involved young people as co-researchers⁵.

Peer researchers may be involved in assisting with research design, developing research tools, collecting and analysing data or writing up and disseminating findings⁶. In the majority of cases, peer researchers have been engaged by professional researchers as advisors under the 'advisory model' of peer research or as paid employees tasked with carrying out a specific part of the planned research—such as refining a questionnaire or recruiting participants - under the 'employment model'⁷. A minority of projects employ what Roche et al. (2010: 3) refer to as 'the partner model' in which peer researchers "are partners or leaders in all aspects of the research" from design and data collection through to analysis, write-up and dissemination of the findings.

Peer research can also be referred to as 'user involvement' or 'service user' research when it is conducted together with the users of a specific service to evaluate that service⁸.

¹ Lushey, 2017, ² Kindon et al., 2007: 1, ³ Wadsworth, 1998, ⁴ Edwards & Alexander, 2011: 269, ⁵ Smith, Monaghan & Broad, 2002; Burns & Schubotz, 2009; Vassadis et al., 2015; Dixon, Ward & Blower, 2019, ⁶ Lushey, 2017, ⁷ Roche et al., 2010: 3, ⁸ Beresford, 2007a; Edwards & Alexander, 2011



Why do peer research?

There are many advantages to adopting a peer research approach. These include:

- **Empowerment:** peer research is premised on a commitment to conducting research ‘with and for’ the subjects of the research⁹. The approach blurs the line between researcher and subject, mitigating the traditional power imbalance inherent in that relationship (Ibid.).
- **Access:** because peer researchers are drawn from the community being studied, they often have privileged access to people who might be unwilling to engage with professional researchers¹⁰. Peer researchers can use their existing networks and relationships of trust to involve subjects that may not otherwise have been included in the research.
- **Lived experience:** peer researchers bring with them the advantage of their own lived experience. Their experiential knowledge and inside understanding of the issues being studied can enhance the richness and nuance of the inquiry¹¹.
- **Better data:** when those conducting research have experience in common with the people they are interviewing, it reduces the risk of misunderstanding between researcher and respondents and increases the likelihood that the inquiry will be relevant to the participants involved¹². In addition, participants may respond more honestly and openly to an interviewer they know has personal experience of the issue being discussed, or with whom they are already familiar and feel they can speak more informally¹³. The result is higher quality data with more depth and nuance.
- **Activated communities:** Participatory approaches critique and challenge academic research as the only legitimate way of knowing¹⁴. In addition, participatory research strives towards “the radical transformation of social reality and improvement in the lives of the individuals involved”¹⁵. Participatory approaches create activated, self-critical communities invested in their own wellbeing¹⁶ and awaken those who participate to their innate potential¹⁷.
- **Benefits to peer researchers:** peer research has the potential to benefit those who participate by providing them valuable work experience and training that may increase their employability in the future¹⁸. A substantial body of evidence indicates that people gain confidence and self-esteem by participating in peer research and finding that they add significant value to the process¹⁹. It may also promote social inclusion among groups who often experience exclusion and isolation such as those challenged by stigma or marginalisation²⁰.

⁹ Lushey, 2016; Edwards & Williams, 2011, ¹⁰ Elliott et al., 2001; Smith et al., 2002; Guta et al., 2013, ¹¹ Beresford, 2007; Dixon et al., 2019; Edwards & Alexander, 2011, ¹² Smith et al., 2002, ¹³ Littlechild et al., 2015; Tanner, 2012; Burns & Schubotz, 2009; Fleming et al., 2009; Kirby, 2004; Dixon et al., 2019; Harding et al., 2010; Vaughn et al., 2018, ¹⁴ Maguire, P., 1987, ¹⁵ MacDonald, 2012: 39, ¹⁶ McTaggart, 1989, ¹⁷ Selenger, 1997, ¹⁸ Dixon et al., 2019; Dowling, 2016; Thomas-Hughes, 2018, ¹⁹ Kirby, 2004; Dixon et al., 2019; Tanner, 2012; Thomas-Hughes, 2018; Burns & Schubotz, 2009; Minogue et al., 2005; Harding et al., 2010, ²⁰ Tait & Lester, 2005; Tanner, 2012; Minogue et al., 2005

Peer research in the UK today

The demand for research that involves community members alongside professionals and academics has grown significantly in recent years²¹, with peer research becoming an increasingly common approach²². In an effort to assess the state of the field of peer research in the UK today, we conducted an extensive desk review and identified 48 projects planned, ongoing or completed over the past five years. Below is a summary of our findings.



Who is doing peer research?

Our review reveals that peer research has been used by charities, universities, foundations, funded programmes, local authorities and social enterprises to generate insight about the groups they work with. The 48 projects we reviewed were led by 31 different entities (some led more than one), the majority of which were charities.

The enthusiastic uptake of the methodology in the charity sector is unsurprising. Charities often work with vulnerable and marginalised groups like refugees, drug users and children in care, with whom a peer research approach may be particularly useful. The methodology's emphasis on centring disempowered perspectives makes it an effective, and potentially liberating, way of working with marginalised communities. In addition, charities' work with vulnerable groups may benefit from an approach that requires researchers to possess lived experience of the issues being studied. Peer researchers may bring a level of empathy, sensitivity and understanding to the work that those without lived experience may lack.

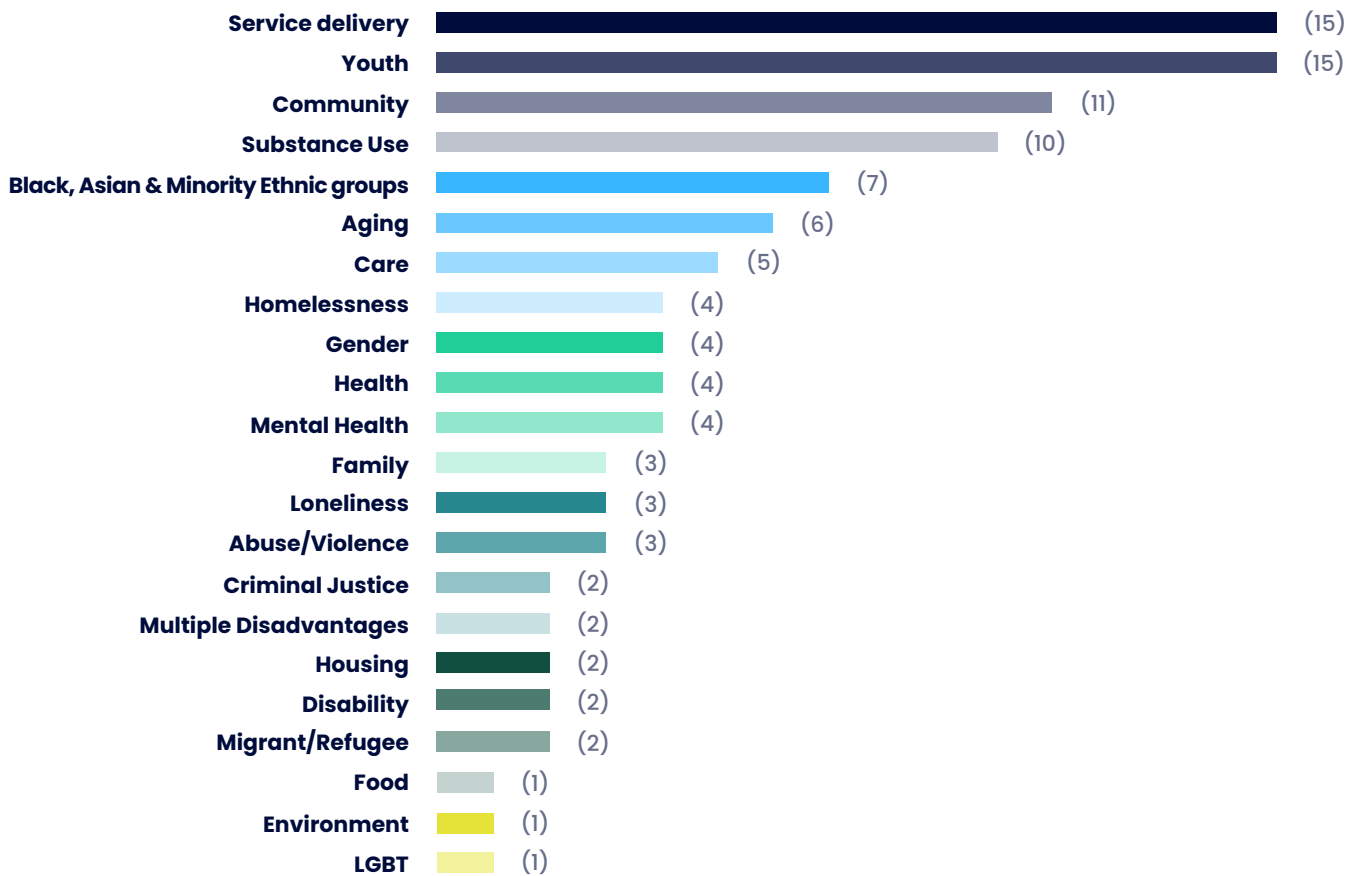
²¹ Boxall & Beresford, 2013, ²² Vaughn et al., 2018

While peer research is perhaps particularly well-suited to the charity sector, its ability to generate useful, interesting and impactful insight could make it valuable in a wide array of potential contexts. For example, only one project in the review was led by a local authority, even though the methodology could be an excellent way to assess local needs and shape policies accordingly.

What research questions and themes does current peer research explore?

The projects reviewed explore an array of topics, and most have more than one focus. The chart below shows the areas of interest the projects cover.

Topics in peer research



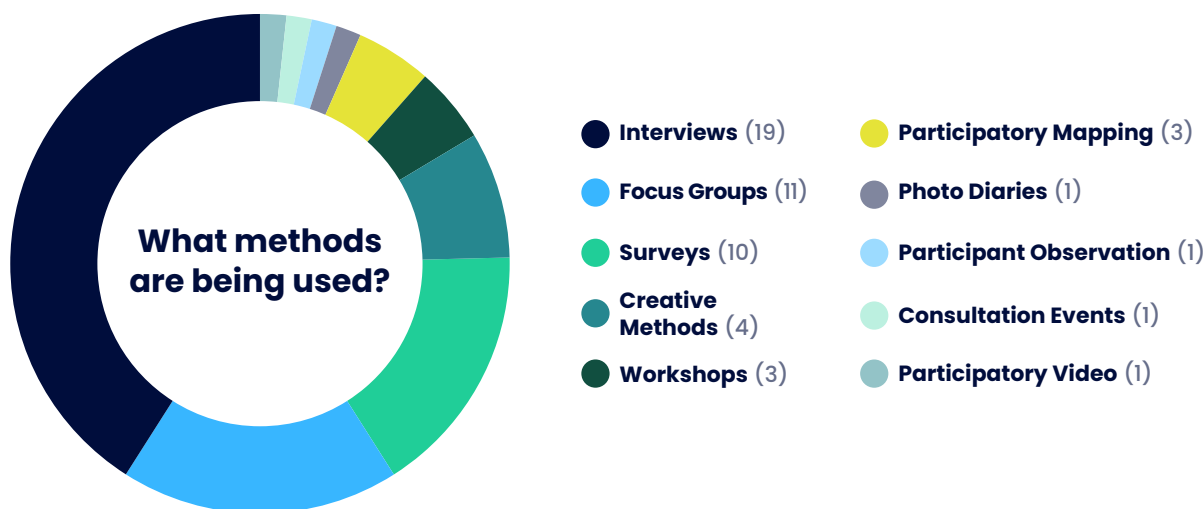
Among the topics explored by peer research, the most prominent is service delivery. Peer research has been used to investigate the impact, quality and reach of services provided by local authorities, charities and funded programmes. For example, Camden Council led a project focusing on families' experiences with child protection services in the borough. The Scottish Refugee Council led a project to evaluate the Scottish Refugee Integration Service. Peer research can be a good way to augment quantitative, output-oriented service evaluations with nuanced, qualitative and experiential data that might otherwise be missed. In addition to service delivery, the top subject areas where peer research has

been used are youth, community and substance use. Peer research with young people has become more prevalent alongside a growing demand for approaches that promote young people's voices around issues that affect them²³.

In addition, most projects will involve some aspect of understanding notions related to community, whether implicitly or explicitly, because peer research is designed specifically around the idea that people are tied together in communities of shared experience²⁴. The prevalence of substance use projects in the review speaks to the methodology's usefulness in research with hard-to-reach groups like drug users²⁵.

²³ Dixon et al., 2019, ²⁴ Edwards & Alexander, 2011, ²⁵ Elliott et al., 2001

What methods are peer researchers using?



Note: in-depth project reports were not available for some of the projects surveyed, especially those which were planned but had not yet been carried out. The chart above thus reflects only the 31 projects where the methods are known.

Peer research is an overarching approach to research with communities that can utilise a number of different methods. Above, we summarise the different methodologies peer researchers used in the projects we surveyed. Many projects used a mixed-method approach.

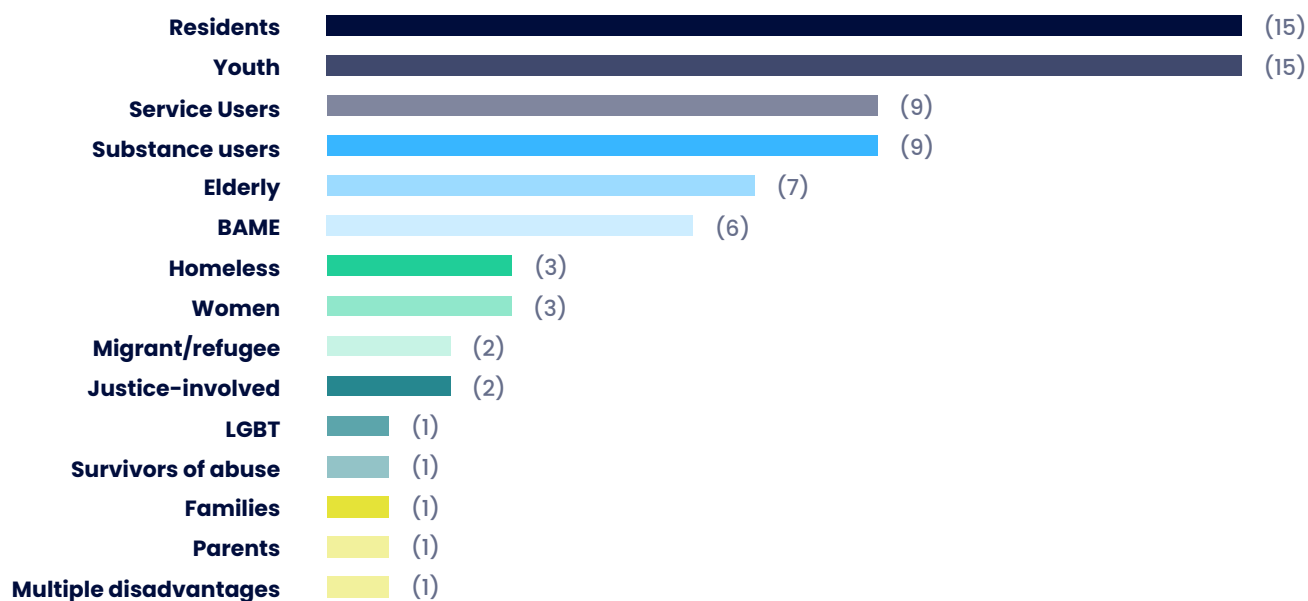
The most prevalent methodology was interviews, which makes sense given the qualitative, in-depth nature of the peer research approach. In addition, interviewing is one of the more straightforward methods to teach people who are new to research given their similarity to everyday conversation.

Focus groups, surveys and creative methods were also used significantly in the projects reviewed. Creative methods include a number of different sub-methods. In the ROOTS LDN project led by YouPress, youth researchers from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds were asked to turn the narratives they had collected from family members into a creative output like a song, short story or graphic novel. The charity 42nd Street ran a project exploring youth loneliness that used storytelling and scenario-building as methods for generating insight. Another good example is the Productive Margins project exploring loneliness among older people around Bristol, in which community researchers worked with a writer to develop monologues based on the data collected.

One of the major gaps in the methodologies currently being used is the lack of digital tools. Although it is likely that some of the studies that used surveys in their research may have collected responses online or through a device like an iPad, none of the projects were built primarily around digital tools. There is substantial opportunity to introduce the use of app-based data collection to peer research. Apps could be combined with creative methods like video and photography and could enable richer, more nuanced in-the-moment data collection.

²⁶ Most of the communities researched were intersecting, e.g. elderly BAME or disabled residents. This chart counts each instance where a community was involved in research. E.g. a project studying elderly BAME residents counts once for 'elderly' and once for 'BAME.'

Demographic groups involved in peer research



Who (or what) is a peer researcher?

In general, a peer researcher is someone who participates in the research process as a member of a geographical or social community being studied. Membership in that community is often contingent on some kind of shared experience of the issues being studied. Below is a chart illustrating the different communities the reviewed projects involved²⁶.

As would be expected from the range of project topics discussed earlier in the report, the most represented demographic groups are residents, youth, service users and substance users (mapping onto the top four topics covered: community, youth, services and substance use).

Despite the seemingly straightforward definition of 'peer researcher,' Edwards and Alexander²⁶ point out its definition, or, for that matter the definition of 'community' or 'community member,' are harder to pin down than it may first appear. They observe: "Shared 'structural'- or 'community'-based characteristics around age, race/ethnicity, gender, beliefs, behaviour, neighbourhood and so on do not mean that people have common identities and subjective realities, and researchers who have had a particular social experience do not necessarily empathise with their peers" (Ibid). They point out that there is a danger in assuming a homogenous experience where one does not exist (Ibid). Peer researchers' relationships to their communities may vary widely²⁷, and this is an issue that needs to be considered when defining what a peer researcher is.

Beyond the question of how to define community membership, there is also a significant need to differentiate between types of peer researchers on the basis of other characteristics.

Compensation

Peer researchers differ on the basis of whether they work on a paid or voluntary basis. It has been difficult to determine whether and how peer researchers have been paid in the projects reviewed but Roche et al.²⁸ have noted that the most common approach among the projects they studied was to hire peer researchers as employees. While the large majority of projects did not make public their model for peer researcher compensation, several, including those run by the Young Foundation did pay peer researchers a living hourly wage for their work.

Although some form of compensation is common, peer researchers may also participate in projects on a voluntary basis. In a report focused on the experiences of peer researchers²⁹, the authors found that some peer researchers they spoke to felt that there was significant value in the work being voluntary. They felt it allowed them to participate more honestly, and for those who, for a variety of reasons, were not in a position to take on short-term precarious paid work, their participation was contingent on the work being voluntary³⁰.

²⁶ Edwards and Alexander, 2011, ²⁷ Thomas-Hughes, 2018, ²⁸ Roche, B., Flicker, S. and Guta, A., 2011, ²⁹ Thomas-Hughes, 2018, ³⁰ Thomas-Hughes, 2018

Level of participation

Peer researchers can also be distinguished by their level of participation in the research, and the different roles they inhabit. Below is a graphic depicting the different levels of peer researcher participation identified in the projects surveyed.

In 42 projects where specific information on peer researcher roles was available, peer researchers were engaged in carrying out fieldwork – conducting interviews, administering surveys, running focus groups, etc. In 21 projects peer researchers were solely engaged in fieldwork. In 13 they carried out fieldwork, participated in data analysis and contributed to the project output, which generally took the form of some kind of report or set of

recommendations. In 8 projects peer researchers carried out fieldwork and performed some data analysis.

These figures demonstrate a relatively high level of participation in research activities overall. The level at which peer researchers are invited to participate is tied up with issues of power in the research process and the extent to which professional researchers are willing to share power with peer researchers³¹. Franks writes: “Given that total participation is in all probability a false goal it may be that the way forward is to develop participative ownership of specific parts of the research process so that participants become stakeholders rather than owners of the research.”

Level of peer researcher participation



21

In 21 projects peer researchers were just engaged in fieldwork



13

In 13 they carried out fieldwork, data analysis and contributed to the project output.



8

In 8 projects peer researchers carried out fieldwork and performed data analysis

Qualification and recognition

In our review, two organisations trained peer researchers using a peer research course accredited by the OCN (Open College Network), and of those, only one took participants through the whole course (the other used one module from the course for training). As a result, the vast majority

of peer researchers in the UK are, as of yet, not defined by any sort of recognised qualification or accredited status. The relatively piecemeal way that peer research has been taken up as a methodology around the UK has so far prevented the development of a standardised way

³¹ Franks, 2011

of training or accrediting peer researchers. As a result, there is currently no consistent or standardised way for peer researchers' skills and experience to be formally recognised or vouched for. This sort of recognition would allow peer researchers to verify the skills and experience

they have acquired through their training and research work, which could enhance their employability in future. Accreditation also has the benefit of signalling to those considering working with peer researchers that they have attained a certain level of skill through training.

Summary

The criteria for who (or what) a peer researcher is, are still largely up for debate. As Roche et al.³² observe: "Issues in defining 'peers' can highlight the uncertainties and lack of consistency that often surround the use of peer research models." They identify the following questions as important to consider:³³

- **Who are 'peers' on a research project?**
- **What constitutes appropriate lived experience?**
- **How do peers relate to the broader community of interest?**
- **What are the specific roles and responsibilities that are envisioned for peers on a project in relation to other members of the team?**

These questions demand deeper consideration by those interested in using peer research, and they may also need to be re-asked with every new project, where different contexts and demands will stipulate different answers.

³² Roche, B., Guta, A., and Flicker, S., 2010 , ³³ Franks, 2011

Questions and Challenges

As Bergold and Thomas³⁴ observe, making the case for participatory research of all kinds “calls for considerable courage and willingness to swim against the current.” Participatory research in general and peer research more specifically imply new ways of sharing power in the research process. They bring up thorny epistemological questions about what kind of knowledge can be considered valid and whether lived experience can serve as reliable data.

There is the question of whether peer researchers, who lack formal academic training, are capable of participating competently in research. We began this report with a substantial argument in favour of peer research, but a more convincing case remains to be presented to policymakers, stakeholders, researchers, commissioners and others whom the approach might benefit. In this section, we outline some of the challenges that will need to be addressed for the methodology to be taken up more widely.

How do we evaluate peer research?

One of the biggest challenges is the lack of a standardised approach or framework with which to evaluate peer research. While assessing the validity of data is always a challenge, with peer research the issue is particularly pronounced, given the involvement of non-academic

researchers. One of the problems that Bergold and Thomas³⁵ identify is that peer researchers and the professional researchers and other stakeholders they are often working alongside will likely all have different views of what ‘good evidence’ consists of. It is difficult to integrate these differing viewpoints in a way that gives each their due, while addressing questions about research quality in a unified way.

In addition, the issue of quality is complicated by the fact that peer research projects may have different goals which carry different weights. All projects are interested in producing worthwhile data. However, many projects are also, or even equally, interested in developing the capacity of the peer researchers involved in the work through the skills training and work experience they gain in the course of carrying out the research. Some projects have in mind the goal of co-producing solutions to problems explored in the research. There is a need for an approach to evaluation that gets at all these elements; that is flexible enough to allow for the different components to carry different weights and to be evaluated using different criteria.

How we evaluate peer research, its impact and the data it produces, is a question that needs to be considered more formally by those working with peer researchers and peer researchers themselves.

³⁴ Bergold, J. and Thomas, S., 2012, ³⁵ Bergold and Thomas (2012)

What is the best way to design and deliver a peer research project?

As Roche et al. observe, there are a lack of clear models of how to do peer research. They write, “It is not uncommon for practitioners to ‘make it up as they go’ in the absence of formal guidelines”³⁶. This points to another question practitioners must address: what is the best way to do it?

A peer research approach demands specialised strategies oriented around the inclusion of non-academic researchers in the research process. These strategies must take into account and formulate ways of working through and around the colliding perspectives of those involved – professional researchers, who have been academically trained, and peer researchers, whose expertise derives from lived experience. Bergold and Thomas (2012) assert that this collision is the productive space from which rich insight can emerge. However, they acknowledge that finding a way to work productively in this space of collision is hard work. They assert: “it is a very demanding process that evolves when two spheres of action – science and practice – meet, interact, and develop an understanding for each other”³⁷.

Participatory research, of which peer research is a subset, is characterised by Cook as “a dynamic and democratic approach...designed to challenge and disturb current understandings for practice.” As such: “Change in how practice is conceptualized and carried out is an expected impact”³⁸. In other words, participatory approaches like peer research innately demand a rethinking of the research process.

This rethinking must consider several important issues.

- **How should decision-making be shared among the research team?**
- **How can power dynamics within the research team be identified and moderated?**
- **How can projects avoid reproducing the structural power inequalities they aim to mitigate?**
- **How can the lived experiences of peer researchers be accounted for, taken seriously and used best to benefit the research?**

These are all questions which those wishing to use peer research must consider. We are still a way off from

comprehensive best practice guidelines when it comes to peer research, but this is the direction we need to head if adoption of the methodology is to gather steam.

What is the value of peer research?

To make the case for peer research, we need to be able to articulate its value as a way of generating insight. For those who have used peer research in their work, its potential may seem apparent. But to those who are unfamiliar with the methodology, the idea that researchers who lack formal academic training have much to contribute to a project may be less clear. There is thus a substantial need to make the case for the value of lived experience researchers, and this should include considerations of the best way insight generated by peer researchers can be applied. The argument may also touch on the value of developing capacity for critical inquiry and self-reflection within marginalised communities. There needs to be a strong argument in support of rethinking the way that research on, in and with communities is traditionally done.

These arguments also need to grapple with the criticisms levelled against peer research, such as whether peer research is as emancipatory or empowering as it aims to be or whether it can slide into reproducing inequalities it aims to moderate³⁹. They need to make the case for the value of data gathered through peer research processes, which, it has been pointed out, is not automatically better just because it has been collected by those with lived experience⁴⁰. This task is tied to the first question explored in this section, about the quality and validity of the data collected using peer research.

Making these arguments will necessitate substantial reflection, experimentation and knowledge sharing among the practitioners of peer research approaches.

³⁶ Roche et al., 2010: 7, ³⁷ 2012: Section 1, ³⁸ Cook, 2012: Section 11, ³⁹ Edwards & Alexander, 2011, ⁴⁰ Edwards & Alexander, 2011



Gaps and opportunities in peer research

This initial desk review has revealed a rich array of projects utilising peer research in the UK. However, given the novelty of the method and its fairly non-standardised implementation to date, we have also identified a number of gaps and opportunities in the field of peer research, which we outline below.

Standardise and legitimise peer research as a methodology

Peer research is not well defined as a research methodology and little guidance exists on ensuring the quality of research undertaken by peer researchers. Therefore, there is an opportunity to define 'peer research' more formally to help standardise the methodology and its implementation, and to set up guidelines for evaluating the validity of the data produced using the methodology. This is also an opportunity to legitimise the methodology in the eyes of policymakers, and other stakeholders who work with communities.

Establish and share best practices

We have identified a few notable peer research networks already in existence where practitioners can share best practices and give each other support.

The first is the Scottish Drugs Forum's (SDF) National Practitioner Forum for User Involvement. The SDF's National Practitioner Forum for User Involvement (Drugs and Alcohol) has been hosted since 2011 and provides a space for practitioners to share best practice, news and ideas on user involvement in the UK. More info can be found [here](#).

The second is the Public Engagement Professionals Network run by the National Coordinating Center for Public Engagement (NCCPE). [The Public Engagement Professionals \(PEP\) Network](#) is primarily aimed at connecting public engagement professionals in the higher education sector and research institutions, rather than peer researchers themselves.

There is also The Mental Health Foundation's [Lived Experience Research Collective](#). The Lived Experience Research Collective aims to bring together peer researchers with lived experience of mental health issues to share and develop new initiatives on how to tackle mental health stigma and discrimination in order to improve the overall health and well-being of people living with mental ill-health.

There is also the [Peer Research Network](#) run by Young London . They connect organisations doing peer research in London, particularly around issues relating to youth.

Finally, there is the Fulfilling Lives Newcastle and Gateshead (FLNG) [Experts By Experience Network](#). Fulfilling Lives is a National Lottery funded program that provides services for people with multiple complex needs and their network links the lived experience researchers FLNG have trained to evaluate their services.

These networks deal with specific issues (mental health, youth and substance use) or are aimed at professionals rather than community researchers themselves. There is significant opportunity to build a national network of peer research practitioners in order to share what works and to provide support for all those interested in learning about and using the approach in their own work.

Training for peer research

Trainings for peer researchers are predominantly designed in-house by charities with modules drawn from existing training for qualitative researchers e.g. ethics, interviews, recruitment etc. There is no tailored or standardised training for peer researchers and a lack of focus on the 'soft skills' needed to be an effective, successful and confident peer researcher. There is substantial opportunity for the creation of a standardised training program or shareable modules that could emerge based on feedback on best practices gathered through the national network of peer research practitioners proposed above.

E-learning and online training

The training methods we reviewed were mostly delivered in person, and while this is probably crucial for some modules, others could probably be delivered in the form of online trainings, which would help courses be more accessible. It might be a good way to test people's skills and understanding, track their learning or have people complete homework outside of in-person training sessions. This would also allow organisations across the country to access the same standardised training from where they are located.

Accreditation

In addition, there is an opportunity to promote a standard accreditation for peer researchers across the UK. Our review identified one existing peer research accreditation scheme through the OCN that only two organisations reviewed are making use of. A standard accreditation would give peer researchers formal recognition of the skills they have learned through training and could be used to support their future employability. In addition, a standardised accreditation would serve to further legitimise the methodology in the eyes of organisations, commissioners or researchers who may be interested in using peer research.

Digital methods

Although it is likely that some of the studies that used surveys in their research may have collected responses online or through a device like an iPad, none of the projects were built primarily around digital methodologies. There is significant opportunity for the introduction of, for example, app-based data collection, which makes data collection easy and accessible to anyone with a smartphone. It also means that data can be collected without the physical presence of the researchers and may yield more in-depth, nuanced data collected in the moment instead of recollected during an interview. Apps could also be combined with creative methods like video-making and photography, which could be built in to allow users to collect and share images and video that could serve as data.

When designing data collection methods, digital literacy and access should be a major consideration. Whilst digital methods can simplify processes for some, they may exclude others and there can be benefits to incorporating both digital and analogue data collection methods when working with groups of peer researchers and respondents who may be 'offline' for a variety of reasons.

Creative methods

There is also an interesting gap to be filled when it comes to creative methods like storytelling, performance and visual art. A few projects surveyed (Hackney as Home, YouPress and Productive Margins) employ creative methods for conducting fieldwork and for the final output. The Hackney as Home project used participatory video production to explore how young people experience a sense of home and belonging in Hackney. These kinds of approaches could

be expanded a lot more, especially for themes touching on community, youth, loneliness and environment. The YouPress project encourages BAME young people to listen to stories from family members which they then turn into creative performances. Another good example is Productive Margins. For their project exploring loneliness among older people around Bristol, community researchers worked with a writer to develop monologues based on the data collected.

Case study: Hackney as Home

From 2013-2015 the Hackney as Home project used peer research and participatory video production to explore how young people experience a sense of home and belonging in Hackney. The five peer researchers spent the summer of 2013 creating short films that capture the experience of living in Hackney. A full description of the project and the films produced by the peer researchers can be found [here](#).

Marginalised groups and stigmatised topics

There is substantial opportunity to encourage the adoption of peer research to explore some of the less well represented topics in the review. In several projects on homelessness, aging and BAME communities peer research has demonstrated its value as a way of researching marginalised groups and could thus be utilised more in the study of the LGBT, refugee or migrant, justice-involved communities, for example. One of the

most powerful uses peer research has demonstrated is its capacity to gather the perspectives of people who are generally unheard, such as those with stigmatising experiences associated with shame and silence. Its implementation could therefore be encouraged in research on stigmatised and/or sensitive subjects like domestic violence, loneliness, abuse and addiction, among others.

Case study: Research on domestic violence and multiple disadvantage

A great example of a project that tackles sensitive issues is the Hand in Hand: Survivors of Multiple Disadvantage Discuss Service and Support report published by Agenda and AVA (Against Violence and Abuse) for the National Commission on Domestic and Sexual Violence and Multiple Disadvantage. 13 women with experiences of domestic/sexual abuse and multiple disadvantage were trained as peer researchers to interview women who have faced or are facing the same challenges. The full report can be found [here](#).

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Appendix

This appendix is a list of all the peer research projects reviewed for this report, organised by location.

London

Organisation	Project	Location
Toynbee Hall	COMPLETED 2018: In 2018 Toynbee Hall led a peer research project exploring the concerns older people in Tower Hamlets. 500 older people living in the local community participated through surveys and interviews. Full report here .	Tower Hamlets
Toynbee Hall	PLANNED: Toynbee Hall is recruiting for a peer research project that will investigate the needs of older people in Tower Hamlets. More information here .	Tower Hamlets
Toynbee Hall	PLANNED: Toynbee Hall is set to lead a project that will examine how private renting can be improved and made more secure for young people in Tower Hamlets. More information here .	Tower Hamlets
YouPress (with the GLA)	COMPLETED 2018: The ROOTS LDN project involved BAME young people as peer researchers to interview family members and turn those interviews into art, writing, music and performances. More information here .	London
YouPress (with the GLA)	PLANNED: After the success of the first ROOTS LDN project, YouPress is recruiting the next group of young people to participate in a second project, which will explore the roots of youth violence in London. More information here .	London
London Youth	COMPLETED 2018: London Youth's A Space of Our Own used peer research to conduct case studies of 10 organisations that are members of London Youth to learn about their impact. Full report here .	London
St. Mungo's	COMPLETED 2018: Participants in the peer research course at St. Mungo's Recovery College participated in a project called On My Own Two Feet exploring why some people return to rough sleeping after time off the streets. Full report here .	London
Revolving Doors	ONGOING: Commissioning Together is a three-year project aimed at improving health and reducing reoffending for offenders and ex-offenders, which uses peer research to evaluate and help better integrate services for this group in the area. More information here .	London
Young Foundation	ONGOING: Amplify Barking and Dagenham is an ongoing project that uses peer research to investigate problems related to social cohesion in Barking and Dagenham. More information here .	Barking and Dagenham

Young Foundation & Hackney Council	ONGOING: The King's Park Moving Together project uses peer research to help the borough of Hackney decide how best to invest money from Sport England.	Hackney
Age East London & GLA	ONGOING: Community researchers carried out a needs assessment of how socially integrated older people from the BAME communities within Newham feel and where they would like to be. More information about the GLA program here .	Newham
High Trees Community Development Trust & GLA	COMPLETED: This project recruited peer researchers to listen to young black men under the age of 25 and BAME older people over 65 in the Tulse Hill and Lambeth communities. More information about the GLA program here .	Tulse Hill and Lambeth
Groundswell for Healthy London Partnership	COMPLETED 2016: For the Healthy London Partnership, Groundswell conducted the peer research project More Than a Statistic to investigate homeless people's experiences of healthcare services in London. Full report available here .	London
Groundswell for Hammersmith and Fulham Commission on Rough Sleeping	COMPLETED: Groundswell conducted the peer research project An End to Street Homelessness to investigate the experiences of over 100 people who had slept rough in Hammersmith and Fulham in the last year. Full report here .	Hammersmith and Fulham
Young Westminster Foundation	COMPLETED: Their City Within a City project uses peer research to understand the experiences and needs of young people in Westminster. Full report here .	Westminster
Young Harrow Foundation	COMPLETED: In the This Is Harrow project, young people served as peer researchers investigating the experiences, challenges and needs of young people in Harrow. Full report here .	Harrow
Camden Council	COMPLETED: Camden Conversations: Our Family-Led Child Protection Enquiry was a peer research project into families' experiences with child protection services in Camden. Full report here .	Camden
Black Out UK & GLA	PLANNED: This research will recruit researchers who identify as Black queer men to explore the experiences of other Black queer men in London.	London
Royal Association for Deaf People & GLA	PLANNED: The project plans to recruit deaf Londoners as peer researchers to gather evidence on the lack of Information Advice and Guidance services that councils provide and how this affects deaf Londoners. More information and application for peer researcher position here .	London
Young Foundation	ONGOING: The Thames Futures project uses peer research to explore residents' experiences of living in Thames Ward and their hopes for the future of their area. More information here .	Barking Riverside

Association for Young People's Health & Working With Men	COMPLETED: This youth-led peer research project explores the aspirations, opportunities and challenges of young people living in Kensington and Chelsea. Full report here .	Kensington and Chelsea
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North of England

Organisation	Project	Location
Fulfilling Lives Newcastle Gateshead	COMPLETED 2018: FLNG used peer research to support the evaluation of Together in a Crisis, a service designed for those who identify as being in a mental health crisis, but who do not meet the local NHS threshold for care. Blog post by peer researcher about working on the evaluation here .	Newcastle and Gateshead
Moving On Tyne and Wear	COMPLETED 2018: This peer research project was an evaluation of the Age Better in Sheffield program, which aims to tackle isolation and loneliness amongst older people in Sheffield. Full report here .	Tyne and Wear
Sheffield Hallam University's Center for Regional Economic and Social Research	COMPLETED 2018: This peer research project was an evaluation of the Age Better in Sheffield program, which aims to tackle isolation and loneliness amongst older people in Sheffield. Full report here .	Sheffield

South of England

Organisation	Project	Location
Young Foundation	COMPLETED 2015: This project was a needs assessment of BAME residents in West Sussex. Full report here .	West Sussex
Revolving Doors	COMPLETED 2013: Revolving Doors ran two peer research projects in Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire with people on probation on behalf of NOMS to evaluate the local probation services. More information here .	Hertfordshire & Bedfordshire
Productive Margins	COMPLETED 2018: The Who Decides What's In My Fridge peer research project explored how people experience the regulation of food habits in their community. Full report here .	Bristol
Productive Margins	ONGOING: The project Alonely investigates the loneliness of older people in in the local community. Full report here .	Bristol
Productive Margins & Up Our Street	COMPLETED 2017: The aim of this project was to find out what wellbeing means to people living in Easton and Lawrence Hill, and what could be done to improve it. Full report here .	Bristol

FORWARD & National FGM Center	COMPLETED 2016: Between Two Cultures is a peer research study into cultural attitudes towards FGM in Essex and Norfolk. Full report here .	Essex & Norfolk
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Midlands

Organisation	Project	Location
Small Steps Big Chances & Nottingham Trent University	ONGOING: SSBC is currently working with the Nottingham Centre for Children, Young People and Families at Nottingham Trent University on an evaluation of the Small Steps Big Chances Program. More information and application for peer researcher position here .	Nottingham

Scotland

Organisation	Project	Location
Scottish Drugs Forum	COMPLETED: The SDF used peer research for a study in Kilmarnock town centre which asked people with a background of substance use about access to treatment and their treatment experience. More information here .	East Ayrshire
Scottish Drugs Forum	COMPLETED: Peer research project into the number of people not usually engaged by services who have a high risk of blood-borne virus. More information here .	East Ayrshire
Scottish Drugs Forum	COMPLETED: Peer research project into the night-time economy of Kilmarnock and local opinion on related issues including safety. More information here .	East Ayrshire
Scottish Drugs Forum	COMPLETED: Peer research project identifying the priorities of people who use services which contributed to Fife Alcohol and Drug Partnership's Service Delivery Plan. More information here .	Fife
Scottish Drugs Forum	COMPLETED: Peer research project consisting of a survey that assessed the needs of people with chronic hepatitis C and who use drugs and do not engage in hepatitis treatment after receiving their diagnosis. More information here .	Fife
Scottish Drugs Forum	COMPLETED: A peer research project into opinions on service quality for substance users in East Dunbartonshire. Full report here .	East Dunbartonshire
Scottish Drugs Forum	COMPLETED: Peer research evaluation of a relapse management and prevention services in East Dunbartonshire. More information here .	East Dunbartonshire

Scottish Drugs Forum	COMPLETED: Peer research evaluation of the provision of 'Trauma Informed Services' in East Dunbartonshire, Scotland. More information here .	East Dunbartonshire
Scottish Refugee Council	ONGOING: The peer research group of the Scottish Refugee Council was formed in November 2017 to support the evaluation of the Scottish Refugee Integration Service. More information here .	Scotland

Northern Ireland

Organisation	Project	Location
Voice of Young People in Care (VOYPIC) & Queen's University Belfast	COMPLETED: The You Only Leave Once? project aimed to find out more about transitions and outcomes for care leavers with mental health and/or learning disabilities in Northern Ireland. Full report here .	Northern Ireland

National

Organisation	Project	Location
Catch 22 National Care Advisory Service	COMPLETED 2015: Catch 22 used peer research to conduct a project into corporate parenting from the perspective of policy and senior managers, social workers, leaving care workers, and young people themselves. Full report here .	National
National Care Advisory Service	COMPLETED: In the Staying Put project, an evaluation of the 18+ Family Placement Program projects, young care leavers interviewed other care leavers with an aim to improving outcomes for young people making the transition from care to independence. Full report here .	National





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