

# Commentary on "I don't know how to find my way in the world": Contributions of User-Led Research to Transforming Mental Health Practice

## An Argument for Collaboration in Methods to Help People with Mental Illness

Thomas H. Bornemann and Jennifer I. Bornemann

The paper by Leahy, Davidson and colleagues argues that the consumer voice is represented directly in research. It vividly describes the challenges and aspirations of mental health

users. And it introduces (CAMHIC) L... ated an office of consumer affairs in their upper management. And there are other striking and concrete examples of the importance

The consumer movement in America has been evolving over the last thirty years from one primarily focused on advocacy, to one that increasingly focuses on helping the mental health system to a much broader agenda including direct involvement in the public policy arena. Over these years, we've seen state governments adopt consumer affairs offices, and major federal agencies such

as the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) have established an office of consumer affairs in their upper management. And there are other striking and concrete examples of the importance of user-led research in determining well-

these methods in conjunction with more conventional quantitative methods

cated and sometimes fractious. But over the past decade, we've seen a trend emerging of a growing mutual respect and recognition that a well-functioning mental health system needs

The consumer movement in America has been evolving over the last thirty years from one primarily focused on advocacy, to one that increasingly focuses on helping the mental health system to a much broader agenda including direct involvement in the public policy arena. Over these years, we've seen state governments adopt consumer affairs offices, and major federal agencies such

as the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) have established an office of consumer affairs in their upper management. And there are other striking and concrete examples of the importance of user-led research in determining well-

Thomas H. Bornemann, Ed.D., is Director, The Carter Center Mental Health Program in Atlanta, Georgia. Jennifer I. Bornemann, L.M.S.W., Address correspondence to Thomas H. Bornemann, Director, Carter Center Mental Health Program, The Carter Center, 452 Freedom Parkway, Atlanta, GA 30307. E-mail: thbornem@emory.edu

Research Methodology

functioning from the very practical instru-

(CPR) is an exciting innovation in research methods that highlights the important role of the community and its members. It represents a form of qualitative research that focuses

are lives. One strength of this method is the emphasis on the involvement of the community in the development of the research. This provides for a feedback loop where information is gathered from a community, analyzed, and returned to the community for application.

Involvement of Beneficiary in Research Process

leagues presents a strong argument for the importance and relevance of community

This paper demonstrates the very centrality of the lived experience, which is critical to the ability of people with mental illness to negotiate their world. This work is by consumers for consumers but of great value to clinicians and others.

In quantitative research, personal experiences that cannot capture the richness of the

narrative, the description of these experi-

the cumulative influence these factors have on a person's ability to function in the community. The authors clearly describe the complexity involved in trying to fully understand the many factors of and impediments to recovery, particularly poverty, isolation, and loneliness.

such as symptom reduction and improved

cannot be separated.

The community participatory method of research is empowering. It recognizes and respects the challenges faced by consumers

questions is respectful. The authors did not rely on the more traditional notion of the word nor did they require the filling out of forms. The researchers did not limit the so the interviewees were not confined by narrow responses.

Future Applications

This study by Davidson and his colleagues presents a strong argument for the importance and relevance of community

dictated by consumers with evidence from an established researcher. It is an important contribution to understanding the challenges and barriers faced by people living with mental illness. The use of community participatory research does not represent an either/or important to find ways that the benefits of both quantitative and qualitative methods

mentary to the recovery experience

ers faced by people with mental illness. We need to explore the collaborative benefits of

that many of the more conventional funding enterprises clearly favor the classic quantitative methodological approach, the randomized control trial. We need more integrated methodologies that capture the strengths of personal experience while ensuring accuracy in an intellectually honest and rigorous way.