

Advancing Peer Support Research and Practice

Simon Coulombe, PhD; Charlie Davis; Emily Cox



Research in your peer
support-related
experience

Existing research

Our current studies

- Thriving Together
- POWeR

Call for involvement

Peer Support Research

- *Take 1 min to write down the **first 3 words or expressions** that come to your mind when you think about the **research in relationship to peer support practice**.*
- What's the role of research in your experience in relation to peer support?
 - Has research been useful or not in your work?
 - Why so?

Peer Support Research Highlights

- Documented positive effects of peer support
"over 30 studies have found positive effects [of peer support]
in numerous outcome domains"

(Davidson et al., 2018, p. 11)



- Canadian studies
(Forchuk et al., 2005; Mulvale et al., 2019; Nelson et al., 2007)



Peer Support Research Highlights

- Documented implementation challenges
 - poor work conditions
 - skepticism and lack of recognition
 - difficult supervision relationship
 - exhaustion and burnout

(Kemp & Henderson, 2012; Mulvale et al., 2019; Rebeiro Gruhl et al., 2015; Vandewall et al., 2016)

- Anecdotal evidence suggests that several Canadian initiatives are successful in integrating peer-support into their services
- Relatively little Canadian research on such successful programs

Thriving Together Study

Promising practices in mental health peer support

1. To identify Canadian organizations/programs that are considered to be *promising*
2. To identify the promising practices and key factors (individual, organizational, and policy) that enable peer-support initiatives to thrive
3. To develop and implement knowledge mobilization activities that fit the needs of the peer-support community.



Study supported by



Peer Support Canada



Canadian Institutes
of Health Research

Instituts de recherche
en santé du Canada

Why Focus on Promising Initiatives?

“Shifting from problems to solutions offering a new way of practicing in health care and health research” (Trajkovski et al., 2013, p. 1232)

Achieving transformative change

- Learning from excellence, identifying high-quality practices and creative solutions that have led to positive results

Participatory Research Structure

- Leader from the peer support community actively involved in the project
 - co-building the research design in collaboration with the rest of the team.
- Peer-research assistants
 - contributing to data collection, analysis and interpretation
- Virtual research community (VRC) as an advisory committee

Current/Past Members of Virtual Research Community

- Andy Cox, social worker, IWK
- Chad Duff, BScN, Comart Foundation
- Christina Marie Phelps, Freelance Art Educator
- Fiona Wilson, Manager, Mental Health and Addiction Program, St. Joseph's Healthcare
- Ian F. Arnold, Consultant in Workplace Health and Safety, Psychological Health and Safety
- Shaleen Jones, now executive director of Eating Disorders Nova Scotia

Current/Past Members of Virtual Research Community

- Andriana Vinnitchok, Project Coordinator, Wilfrid Laurier University
- Charlie Davis, PhD Student, Project Coordinator, Wilfrid Laurier University
- Christine Khalil, RA, Wilfrid Laurier University
- Dylan Methner, RA, Wilfrid Laurier University
- Janie Houle, Professor, Université du Québec à Montréal
- Kari-Anne Eby, RA, Wilfrid Laurier University
- Leah Parent, RA, Wilfrid Laurier University
- Sophie Meunier, Professor, Université du Québec à Montréal
- Stephanie Badziszewski, PhD Student, Université du Québec à Montréal

Study Design

- Identification of 8 promising peer support initiatives
- Data collection
 - Interviews/focus groups with 5-10 key informants per program

“What aspects of the management of your organization do you believe contribute to making the program healthy and strong?”



Selection Process by 5 Graders

Points system: between 0 and 2 on each of the four following criteria:

- ✓ Alignment with the principles of practice for peer support
- ✓ Positive outcomes or experience for those receiving peer support
- ✓ Positive outcomes or experience for those offering peer support
- ✓ Healthy and strong organization

Grading Scheme Example

e.g., Positive outcomes or experience for those receiving peer support

0 = no mention of benefits of peer support program

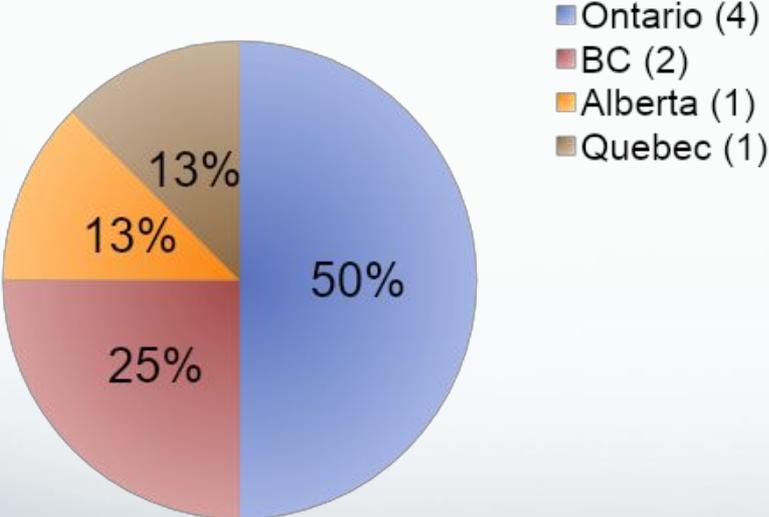
1 = mention of benefits of peer support program

2 = mention of benefits of peer support program + examples
and promising evidence
(i.e., an explanation of the example; stats, figures, etc.)

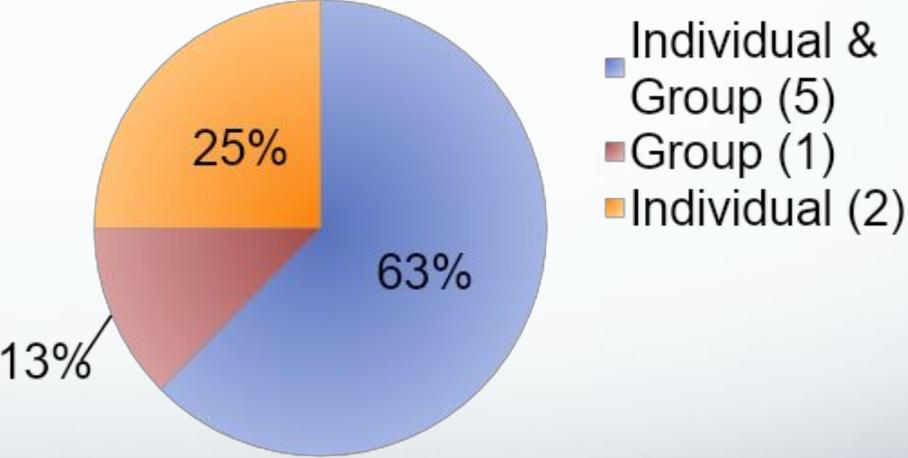
Selected Programs: By Province & Type of Support

From 52 nominated programs
including several that received more than one nomination

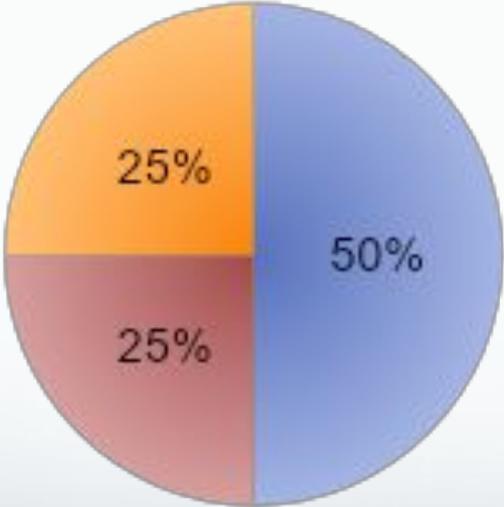
Province



Form of Support



Selected Programs: By Type of Program



- Non-Profit/Community-Based (4)
- Health Care or Clinical Setting (2)
- Work-Related Organization (2)

Selected Programs: Populations Served Examples

- First Responders
- Children & Youth
- Families
- Young Adults
- Individuals with Complex Health Needs
- Peer Supporters and Peer Support Organizations*

Highlights from Preliminary Results (I)

- Key factors underlying thriving peer support initiatives
 - Service delivery
 - Integration of peer support within larger organization
 - Supportive management

Intentional Support

“There’s constant feedback and change to practice if it’s needed...

There are supports built into our structure to support me when things are going difficult personally.

There’s intentionality built in.”

Supportive Manager

“I was one of the first peers hired. I used to say it was like coming into an old man's club and trying to break down some barriers and stigma and educate people. Once I broke through those walls, it wasn't so bad but we also had a great leader who was a believer of peer support. I think that that's what made a big difference is we had a leader who was there in the beginning who believed in peer support that kind of led the way for us. Otherwise, I think the road wouldn't have been as easy. ”

Highlights from Preliminary Results (II)

- How can we enhance peer support?
 - How can we measure success?
 - And how can we promote peer support outside of peer support circles?

Measuring Impact

“So measuring the impact of the work is sometimes challenging. How do we measure it? How do we evaluate it? How do we measure it? Because like I said, we are trying to implement it into constructs that are based on the metrics or narratives that we might not be that familiar with.”

Lack of Action

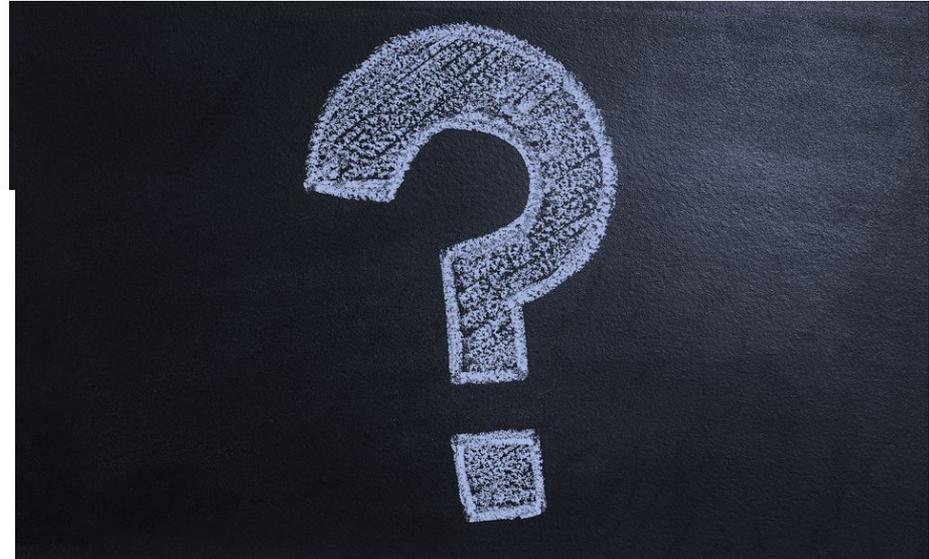
*“There seems to be a lot of studies **but not a lot of action** from my perspective from the way I see things. I would say that it’s very easy for peers to kind of start to blend into the background of their agencies and just become, you know, something **that’s politically correct to hire peer support staff** onto the agency because it’s the right thing to do. **But not really implement some of the research** that’s coming out and put that into practice in terms of looking at things through a peer lens.”*

A Way to Promote Peer Support

*“Someone’s going to have to come up with a way to attach a dollar value to hope, to be blunt. Someone’s going to have to attach **a dollar value to hope.**”*

“We don’t know the whole entire story but to hear some of the comments that the doctors made, the doctors were saying that the police told us he was a bad man that may not be deserving of treatment and how that impact his care...it’s a very sad state of affairs ...and these are the experts passing judgment.”

How can we best disseminate such results and make them useful?





PEER SUPPORT OUTCOMES AT WORK **RESEARCH**

Occupational Recovery

Recovery: "a way of living a satisfying, hopeful and contributing life, even with the limitations caused by illness" (Anthony, 1993, p. 527)

Recovery is an **occupational** journey (Doroud et al., 2015)

Occupational recovery outcomes:

- Work status
- Absenteeism/presenteeism
- Functional impairment
- Perceived productivity at work
- Workplace well-being
- Occupational engagement
- Occupational projects

POWeR Study



Despite positive findings related to mental health impacts of peer support, quantitative studies have yet to be conducted in Ontario or in Canada specifically about the **occupational** recovery outcomes of peer support services

Main objectives of the study



Assess the group-level longitudinal changes on the occupational recovery outcomes in a sample of people receiving peer support, measured three times.



Examine if diverse participants have different outcome trajectories, depending on clinical and demographic variables, as well as peer support and work characteristics

Research Methods

2-year longitudinal study

300 participants receiving peer support in any settings

3 phone/online interviews per participant over 6 months

Rigorous measurement scales

Informed by a multidisciplinary
advisory committee

Project supported by:



Partnering Organizations

- Canadian Mental Health Association Waterloo Wellington
- Mood Disorders Association of Ontario
- Ontario Peer Development Initiative
- Support & Housing Halton
- Stella's Place
- Supported Training & Rehabilitation in Diverse Environments
- Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB)

We need your help to recruit participants!

- Peer supporters are invited to give our invitation to the peers they support
- Organizations are invited to transfer our material to peers and peer supporters
- Invitations to post our social media announcements



- Study email: POWeR@wlu.ca
- Project summary video:
<https://vimeo.com/341398279>
(video password: power)
- To request recruitment materials
(postcards/posters): bit.ly/powerrecruit

What are the impacts of peer support
on your work experiences?



Are you starting to receive peer support for mental health and/or addiction
issues? Are you currently working or on leave from work?

You are invited to participate in POWeR (Peer support Outcomes at Work Research), a study about the
impact of mental health and/or addiction peer support on your work experiences.

What you need to know

1. Three 60-75 minute interviews (online or on the phone) scheduled 12 weeks apart.
2. For each interview, you will receive a \$25 gift card to Tim Hortons, Starbucks, or Amazon.

To participate or learn more, please provide your contact information at the following link:
bit.ly/powercontactus

The team is hoping to connect with people before or as they are starting to receive peer
support, so please complete the form promptly if you would like to participate.

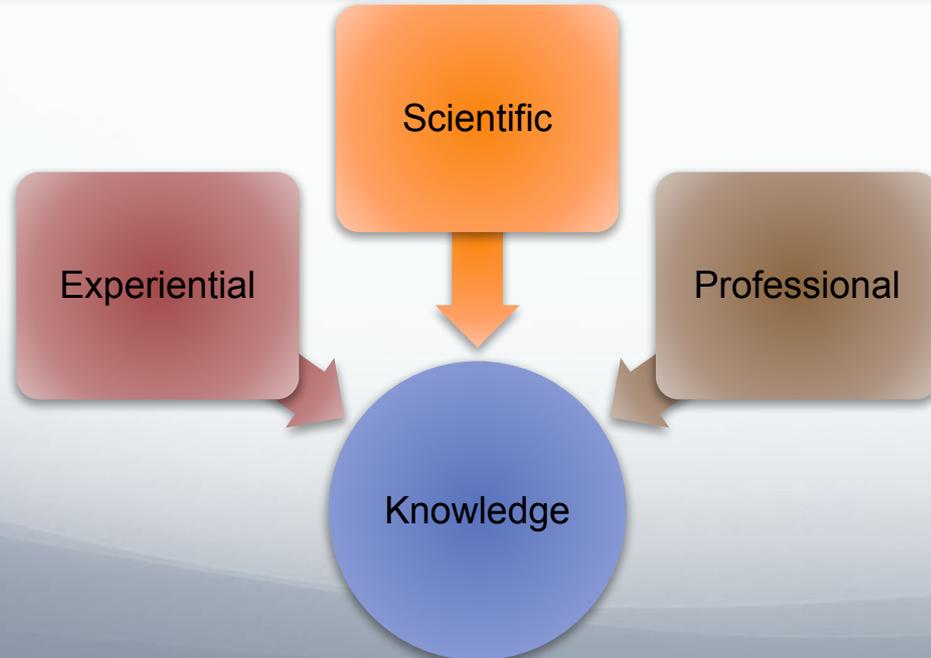
Contact us with any questions at: POWeR@wlu.ca

POWeR
Peer support Outcomes at Work Research

This study has been approved: REB #9901

Conclusion: Envisioning the Future of Peer Support Research

By 2024, we will have access to rigorous research-based information on ... (topic related to peer support)



- How can we best collaborate?
- How to make sure experiential and professional knowledge is integrated with scientific knowledge?

Thank
You



peersupport@wlu.ca

OR power@wlu.ca