

Peer Mentoring:

with women who experience multiple
and complex disadvantage after
trauma and abuse

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What is peer mentoring

An individual with some shared, lived experience, providing one to one practical guidance and support to another individual. The shared, lived experience should relate to experience rather than simply being of the same sex.

(Gilbert, 2023)

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Peer Mentoring: Research Objectives

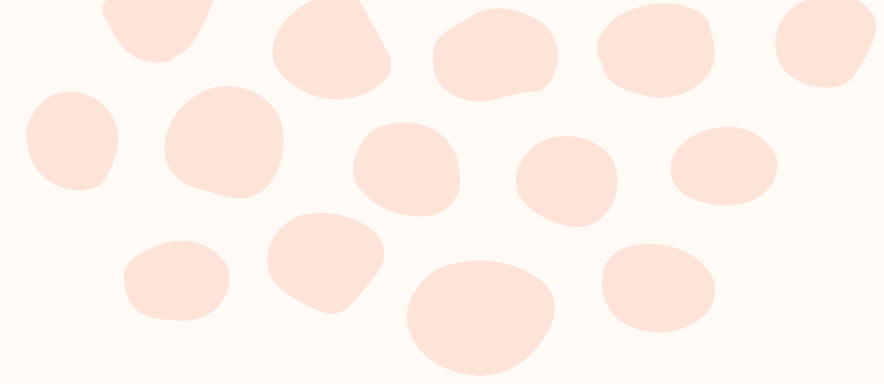
To examine the use of 1:1 peer mentoring with women who experience multiple and complex disadvantage in England emanating from experiences of domestic/sexual abuse and trauma.

To consider a feminist qualitative approach when investigating what works for women peer mentors and mentees and to identify potential areas of difficulty in peer mentoring practice.

To advance the stories of women participating in peer mentoring, creating a space where they can give voice to their own experiences.



Methodology & Methods



- Ontological and epistemological feminist positioning as a feminist researcher and as an insider. Feminist ethics of care (Noddings, 1984).
- A feminist paradigm of enquiry using in-depth, qualitative, semi-structured interviews took place with decision-makers, peer mentors, and mentees at 3 women's organisations located in England (24 interviews).
- Geographically diverse areas of the country- Different women, different communities, different approaches.
- Data was evaluated by way of reflexive thematic analysis.
(Braun and Clarke, 2022)

Findings from the study connected to women's peer mentoring

COMPLEX & MULTI FACETED

Complex form of community support, providing a welcome approach away from formal, statutory provisions usually experienced by women.

ORGANISATIONAL INVESTMENT

Peer mentoring requires a large amount of investment in organisational time and funding to do well. Requires clear ethical considerations.

UNIQUE SOURCE OF SUPPORT

Offers something uniquely positive in reaching women who survive trauma and multiple disadvantage.

VALUABLE IN HEALING

This study provides new knowledge on the value and restorative features of peer mentoring to women who experience multiple and complex disadvantage.

Community connections disappeared

‘For women, embeddedness in a community of friends, neighbours, relatives and workmates was the most effective way to counterbalance the overwhelming power of men, both in the family and in society.’

(Hunt, 1992:23)

‘The professionalization of community support can act to objectify individual community members, professionals become institutionalized and disconnected from the lives they work with. This is the trouble with institutions, institutions don’t care because they can’t. People care.’

(Russell, 2020:xv)



Unmet need of women in communities



“There’s nothing here really, we are forgotten by services, and if there’s more than one thing [one complex issue], you’ve had it!”

Lilly, Mentee Organisation One

“And a lot of the time, a lot of the women I talk to, they can feel as if they’re not being listened to and not being understood, because people can have great book learning and great intentions, but the actual understanding isn’t there.”

Shiv, Peer Mentor, Organisation Two

“I, and I know our women say they get sick and tired going round agencies being assessed and signposted to absolutely nothing and it’s the same scenario every time. Reels and reels of paperwork and questions, having to tell your story again and again and again and actually no one giving you any help.”

Bella, Mentee, Organisation Three

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The Bridge between

“Community engagement is very much about what the mentoring service should be about, so that we’re actually identifying where the gaps are and trying to work with, you know, single issue provision for the most discriminated against women and include them.

So, it’s about becoming a bridge, I suppose to other services and to support them into those services, and to, you know, often it’s about children and going into case conferences and supporting that, actually as well. Or family court... or CAFCASS stuff. If the issues are there, erm, then we try and do it.”

Helen,
Decision Maker, Organisation Three

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Counteracting the 'uselessness'

“I honestly cannot tell you; I could not put it into words the difference [between statutory agencies and her peer mentor] honestly. All they succeeded in doing so far is caused a million times more damage than needed to have been caused and nothing has been supportive with them, nothing has been helpful. So, my mentor and the Women's Centre have actually been the opposite of useless. They've kind of counteracted the uselessness of the agencies that shouldn't be useless, if you know what I mean?”

Lizzy, Mentee, Organisation Three

Research: A Contribution to knowledge



- Adds new knowledge to understanding 1:1 peer mentoring delivered in a trauma responsive way within women's organisations - specifically with women who experience multiple and complex disadvantage resulting from trauma.
- This study reflects a firmly feminist methodological and ethical approach to examining this activity.
- The study is important in expanding understanding of the benefits of, and potential of peer mentoring and the current difficulties women experience when attempting to accessing community support that meets their holistic and expressed need.

Summary

- There is a strength and enthusiasm within interview participants to come together to support each other. A safe space to heal from domestic and/or sexual abuse.
- Peer mentoring can be a way to both reinforce women's own survival and recovery, also enables reciprocity, 'giving back' and making meaning from women's own disadvantaging experiences.
- Interview participants felt peer mentoring was essential as a 'bridge' to access hard-to-reach services and community-based support mechanisms.
- The study illustrates that peer mentoring is strengthened by a Feminist ethical approach and shines a light on the tensions and dilemmas connected with implementation and practice.

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Cohort 4

A safe place to dream,
A place to belong.

A place where I am good enough,
just as I am.

'J'

IMAGE REDACTED