

Advancing Peer Support Research

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Link to video: <https://vimeo.com/41227684>

*Special thanks to Charlie Davis for
their contribution to the slideshow content.*

Peer Support Research

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



Existing/current
research

POWeR study

Call for involvement

Peer Support Research Highlights

Documented positive effects of peer support

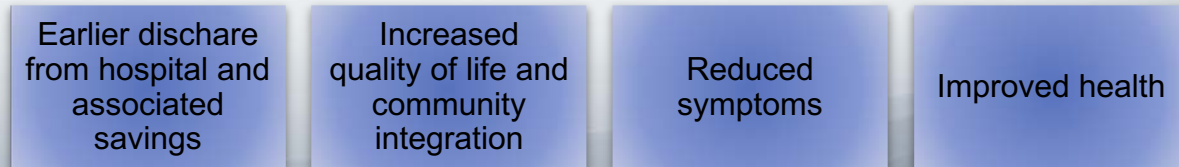
"over 30 studies have found positive effects [of peer support] in numerous outcome domains"

(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 the diversity of 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



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

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 Radziszewski, PhD Student, Université du Québec à Montréal

Methods

- Identification of 8 promising peer support initiatives through as national nomination process

Thriving together: Promising practices in mental health peer support

Do you know a thriving mental health peer support program?

Would you like to share the organization's story?

11. Thriving peer support programs often share a few key elements, such as alignment with the principles of practice for peer support (e.g., [Guidelines for the Practice and Training of Peer Support, MHCC](#)), positive outcomes for those receiving peer support, trained and supported peer supporters, and a healthy and strong organization.

Tell us about why this peer support program is thriving, and what evidence do you have to support this (e.g., service log data, evaluation results, factual observations, etc.)? (Max. 400 words)

Selection Process by 5 Graders

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

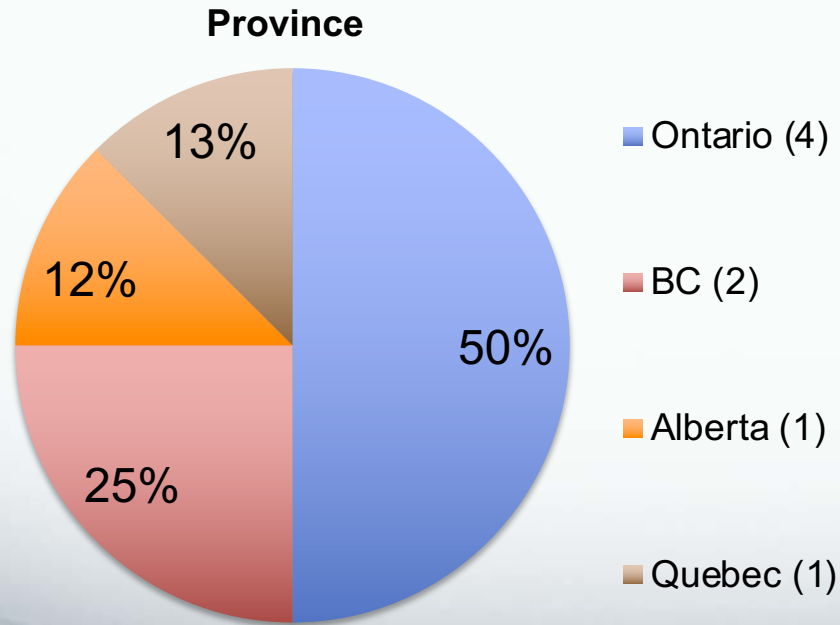
- ✓ Alignment with the principles of practice for peer support
- ✓ Positive outcomes or experience for those receiving peer support
- ✓ Positive outcomes or experience for those offering peer support
- ✓ Healthy and strong organization

Grading Scheme Example

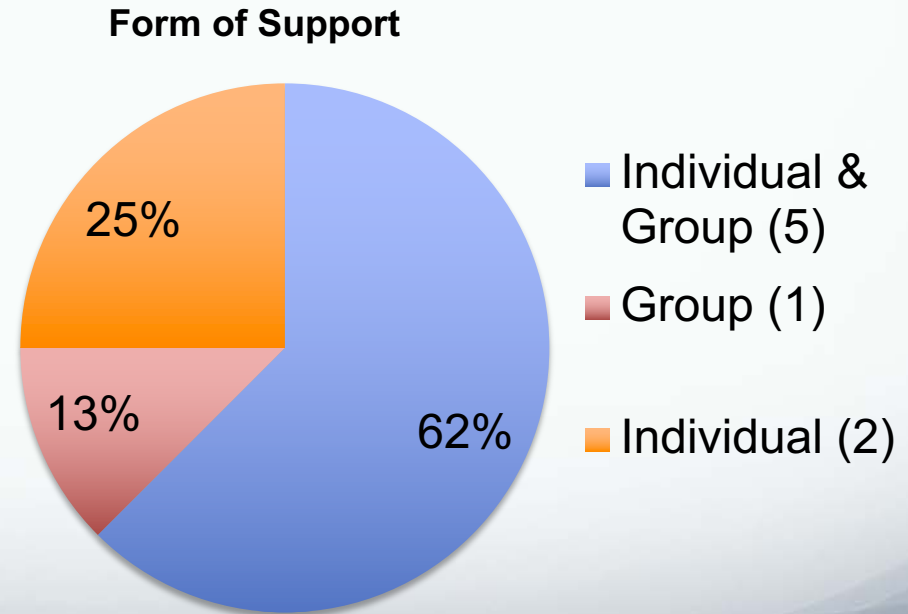
e.g., Positive outcomes or experience for those receiving peer support

- 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.)

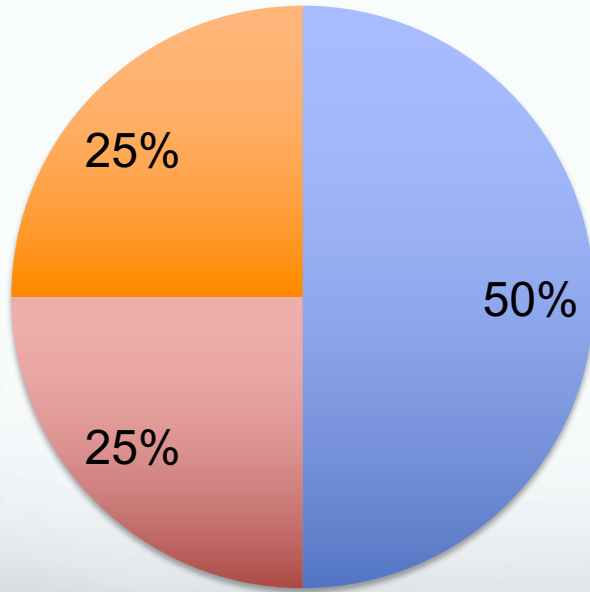
Selected Programs: By Province & Type of Support



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



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*

Methods



- Data collection
 - Interviews/focus groups with 5-10 key informants per program

*“In your opinion, what does successful peer support mean?
How can we tell if a peer support program is successful or beneficial?”*

“What aspects of the management of your organization do you believe contribute to making the program healthy and strong?”
- Data analysis
 - Inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Highlights from Preliminary Results (I)

- Key factors underlying thriving peer support initiatives
 - Adaptability
 - Agility
 - Service delivery tailored to contexts
 - Integration of peer support within larger organization
 - Supportive management/leaders and champions

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 & Champions

“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 and its success?
 - 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.”

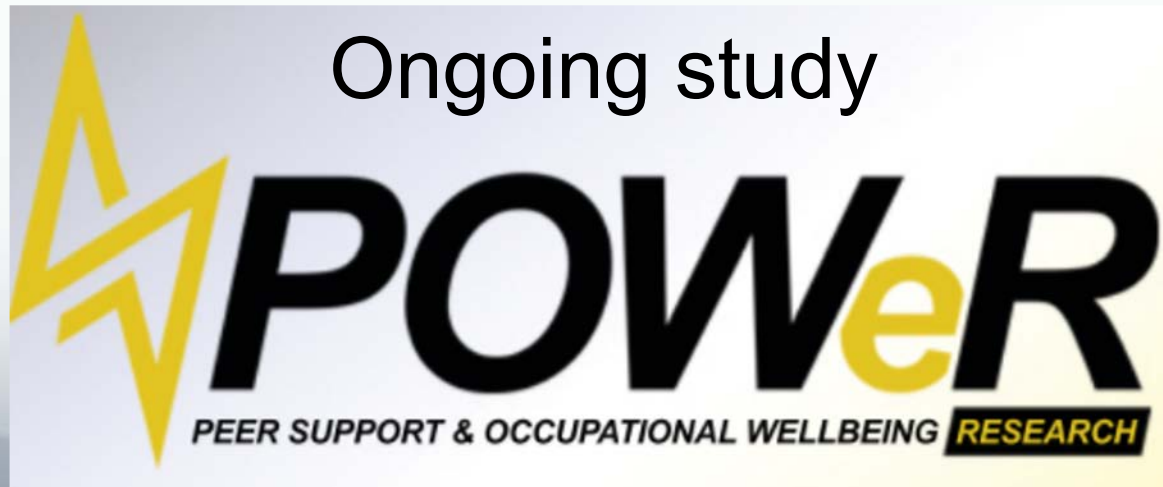
A Way to Promote Peer Support

“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.”

Importance of Challenging the System

“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.”

One way for us to contribute to enhancing the evidence base on the outcomes of peer support and to highlight the importance of recognizing peer support in all spheres of life.



Background

“Poor employee mental health has become one of Canada’s most prevalent and costly occupational health issues” (Dimoff & Kelloway, 2013, p. 203).

The WSIB statistics show that mental health disorders or syndromes occupied the 8th rank in 2016 in terms of percent of lost time claims.

Peer support represents a crucial avenue to reduce the pressure on the health care and insurance systems and the personal and societal impacts of mental health issues faced by Canadians.

Gap

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

- (re-)engagement with meaningful occupations through adjusting projects and goals, and in turn, promoting hope, empowerment, and sense of social contribution.
- Occupations include formal employment but also community participation and unpaid work

However, despite positive (yet mixed) 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

Occupational Recovery Indicators

Occupational Recovery is defined as including elements of quality and quantity related to occupational engagement (at home, in the community and in the workplace), on both positive and negative indicators:

- 1) Work status, including mental health-related leave and return to work parameters (Durant et al., 2014)
- 2) Absenteeism and presenteeism (Lam, Michalak, & Yatham, 2009)
- 3) Functional impairment (Sheehan & Sheehan, 2008)
- 4) Perceived productivity at work (Kessler et al., 2003)
- 5) Workplace wellbeing (e.g. satisfaction, competence, social relationships; Rautenbach & Rothmann, 2017)
- 6) Occupational engagement (i.e., “performance of a variety of meaningful and routine-based occupations”; Tjörnstrand, Bejerholm, & Eklund, 2007, p. 103)
- 7) Occupational projects (i.e., personal goals, such as getting a promotion, returning to school/work; Christiansen, Little, & Backman, 1998)
- 8) Community participation (Kaplan et al., 2012)
- 9) Unpaid work (Gewurtz et al., 2006)

POWeR Study

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

Main objectives of the study



Assess the group-level longitudinal changes on the occupational 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 occupational 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:



Measured Variables

Occupational Outcomes

- Occupational projects
- Occupational engagement
- Community participation
- Unpaid work
- Leave-related variables (e.g., timing of initiation of leave and return [if at all], job tasks following return)
- Absenteeism/presenteeism
- Productivity
- Wellbeing at work
- Functional impairment

Occupational/Workplace Characteristics

- Occupation-related variables (e.g. type of labour: unpaid/paid; job title, etc.)
- Workplace climate

Peer Support Variables

- Characteristics of peer support: modality, frequency, etc.
- Perceived quality of peer support: Alignment with foundational peer support values and principles
- Impact of the peer sharing lived experience

Mental Health Covariates

- Psychological distress
- Positive wellbeing
- Mental health recovery
- Mental health self-management

Personal Characteristics

- Demographics & clinical variables
- Additional services received

Inclusion Criteria

1. Currently receiving, or starting to receive, peer support for mental health and/or addiction issues
1. Resident of Ontario
1. 16 years of age or older
1. Able to understand and speak English

***This study is **not** restricted to individuals who are currently working.*

Partnering Organizations

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

Knowledge Translation Plan

Fact sheets explaining impacts of peer support on occupational/workplace outcomes

Online videos sharing testimonials and lived benefits of peer support

Step-by-step guide for workplace managers interested in implementing peer support programs

Policy brief presenting the results on occupational outcomes of peer support

Scientific manuscripts

Conference presentations

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 (posters, postcards, etc.) to peers and peer supporters

*** Each study participant receive **\$25 gift card** to Amazon, Starbucks, or Tim Hortons for each interview.

- Study email: POWeR@wlu.ca
- To request recruitment materials (postcards/posters): bit.ly/powerrecruit

What are the impacts of Peer Support on your Wellbeing and/or Occupational Recovery?

Are you currently receiving peer support for mental health and/or addiction issues?

You are invited to participate in POWeR (Peer support and Occupational Wellbeing Research), a study about the impact of mental health and/or addiction peer support on your wellbeing and/or occupational recovery.

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.

The study is open to both people who are currently working and those who are not currently working.

To participate or learn more, please provide bit.ly/powercontactus

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

POWeR
Peer support & occupational wellbeing research

This study has been approved by the Wilfrid Laurier University Research Ethics Board

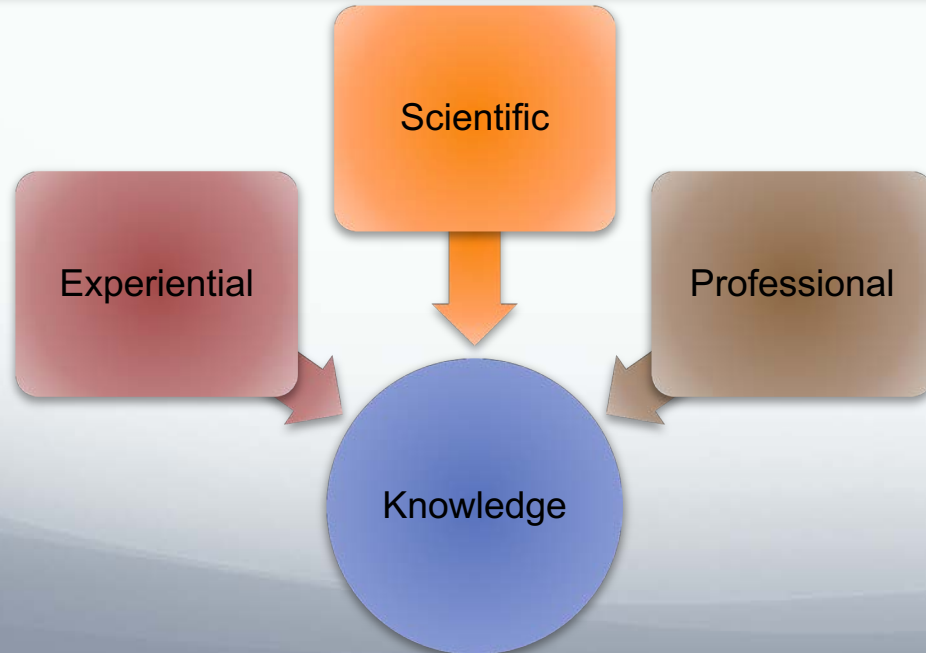


Why helping us?

- Contributing to more Ontario-based research results about peer support.
- Quantitative data (complementary to existing qualitative research) on the impacts of diverse forms of peer support.
- Local research evidence to support your work (e.g., funding applications) and the work of decision-makers, occupational health policy-makers and service providers.
- Raising awareness of the importance of peer support as a key service to support people with mental health and/or addiction issues.
- Influencing the Ontario/Canada research agenda on peer support.

Conclusion: Envisioning the Future of Peer Support Research

By 2025, 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



power@wlu.ca