

Exploratory Research Study Of Peer Support Provision For People With Anxiety

The Katherine and Harold Fisher Anxiety Research Fund is a new fund that is supported through donations from Anxiety UK supporters, members and fundraisers. For the fund's first project, Anxiety UK asked the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) to find out more about how people with anxiety use peer support.

Peer support is the support given to each other by people who have experience of a similar challenge, in this case living with anxiety. This can happen in self help groups which meet locally, or online. We suspected that people who were anxious about meeting with other people might prefer online peer support.

What did we do?

We looked for what other people have written about this. Anxiety UK sent out a survey to their membership and to their followers on social media. In the survey, we asked if people would like to be interviewed about their experiences, and we phoned some of these people. We then looked at all the information we had, and wrote up a final report for Anxiety UK. You can get a copy of the full report from them, and it is also on their website (anxiety.org.uk).

What did we find out?

People with anxiety experience difficulties in getting the services and support they want. Over half of the people in the survey said that current services were not appropriate, and nearly three quarters said that online services would be more accessible.

People said that waiting times, lack of information, negative attitudes (stigma), and travel difficulties prevented them from getting support, as well as their own anxiety. Work commitments were also a problem for nearly half of the people who answered the survey.

Some people did not really understand the term 'peer support'. Most people had no previous experience of peer support, including online groups. Between a quarter and a third of people said this was because of their anxiety. They said that it would help if groups were smaller and planned so that people knew what to expect, with good organisation. People who had experienced peer support were very positive about it.

People had mixed views about online support. Some people liked the anonymity and that it was easy to access at any time of day. But other people were worried about un-moderated sites and were concerned that their own anxiety might increase if they read other people's stories.

Conclusion

There is a need for more support for people with anxiety. This needs to be in a safe and secure space, and include both face to face peer support and online support.

Recommendations for the next steps are:

- a survey of AUK membership for their views on the results of this initial study
- further interviews to increase the number of responses from a wider group of people, particularly men who experience anxiety
- discussions of the report with people who can influence and make decisions about services.