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Researching alcohol online support groups

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Contents

- Description of research
- Some issues encountered so far

Topic

- How the discussion forums of alcohol online support groups (AOSGs) can support the acquisition, development or confirmation of a user's beliefs about their alcohol use disorder.

Rationale

- Beliefs impact on outcomes
- Varied explanations of AUD
- Best experience if individual and group beliefs align

Value of online support groups

- Support
- Practical, day-to-day advice
- Particularly helpful for certain groups
- Available 24/7

Research questions

- RQ1: How can the discussion forums of AOSGs support the acquisition, development or confirmation of users' understandings of their illness/problem?
- RQ2: How do specific methods (such as story, tips/advice, role modelling) enable the achievement of these ends in non-AA/12 step forums?

Research questions

- RQ3: Does story play the same role in non-AA/12 step forums that it does in AA?
- RQ4: Is Leventhal, Nerenz & Steele's Common Sense Model of illness representation a helpful tool to use in analysing drinking representations in AOSGs, including where problem drinking is defined as something other than an illness?

Methodology

- Qualitative 2-arm study
- Forum post analysis of 3 groups
- Semi-structured in-depth interviews
- Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis

Work to date

- Recruiting
- Thematic analysis of 500 posts per group
- Writing up
- Begun interviews

Ethics - consent

- Public or private space?
- Check for site attitude to researchers
- Consent from Administrators / Moderators
- What about people who have left?

Ethics - anonymising

- Anonymising usernames
- Re-wording quotations with checks
- What about intellectual property rights?
- Anonymising the group
- Using description rather than quotation
- Third parties

Other issues

- Changeability of sites
- Functionality provided
 - Deleted posts
 - Newcomer threads
 - Emoticons
- What's going on off-stage?

Nvivo 11

- Very good for data collation
- Good for linking codes into themes
- Memo function
- Need for context
- Need to combine with the full threads

Interview issues

- Recruitment
- Consent without breaking anonymity
- Effects of alcohol

In conclusion:

- Ethics – consent, anonymization
- Fluidity of sites
- Whispers happening off-stage
- Constraints of functionality available
- AOSG research overload

Conclusion, cont.

- What makes for sufficient ‘informed consent’?
- Using the ‘wrong’ language
- Interviewing someone under the influence of alcohol