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Adopting a community based participatory research approach to explore citizenship in mental health within the Scottish context

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Citizenship is a concept often understood in terms of the duties, rights, obligations and functions a person has as a member of society. In mental health policy and practice, however, the term has broader reach. People with lived experience of mental health problems (MHPs), an often marginalised and excluded population, face obstacles to gaining the full range of opportunities that are typically available to the population in general. Citizenship, as a framework for supporting the social inclusion and participation in society of people with experience of MHPs, is receiving increased attention internationally in academia, policy and health and social care practice. Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) principles were used to develop a conceptual framework of citizenship for people experiencing MHPs and/or other life disrupting events in Scotland. The use of CBPR replicated an approach adopted as part of an international collaboration in understanding citizenship across diverse social and cultural contexts. CBPR comprises of a range of approaches and techniques which aim to transfer the 'power' from the researcher to the participants. Participants have control over the research agenda, its process and actions. Most importantly, peers researchers are involved in all stages of the research process including collecting data and analysing and reflecting on the data generated in order to obtain the findings and draw conclusions from the research. Reflecting on adopting a CBPR approach, it is argued that it encourages the development of a model of citizenship that is entirely grounded in the perspectives and lived experiences of people experiencing MHPs. The need for adequate resources, preparatory work, training, research management and reflexive practice are key to the success of a CBPR approach with peer researchers.

Keywords: citizenship, mental health, mental health policy

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