The Bipolar Youth Action Project: Conducting Community-Based Participatory Research with Youth with Bipolar Disorder

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Background

Bipolar disorder is a mood disorder characterized by depressed and manic (or hypomanic) mood states[1]. Its typical onset occurs in adolescence or early adulthood[2], and some evidence suggests that interventions at this stage of the condition may be more effective than later[3]. Over a decade of research, CREST.BD has developed a strengths-based community-based participatory research model for working with adults with bipolar disorder[4]. A logical next step was to expand the model to partner with youth.

The Bipolar Youth Action Project (BYAP) aimed to expand the literature on effective self-management strategies utilized by youth with bipolar disorder, and investigate their preferred means of knowledge translation. The BYAP was conducted in partnership with youth co-researchers with bipolar disorder. This poster shares the output and the lessons learned from working with youth co-researchers.

Method

The 24-month project moved through four phases, each directly involving youth with bipolar disorder:

1. grant-writing;
2. recruiting and training 12 youth peer researchers with bipolar disorder;
3. Research Forum I, which recruited additional youth to consult on self-management strategies; and
4. Research Forum II, which recruited additional youth to consult on knowledge translation methods.

Results

7 of the initial 12 peer researchers remained on the BYAP from recruitment to project end. Peer researchers built capacity in multiple domains, including:

- public speaking (N=7);
- event planning (N=7);
- qualitative data analysis (N=1);
- presenting findings (N=7);
- social media management & outreach (N=4)

Youth engagement peaked around Forums and increased with check-in emails, mutually selected deadlines, and support from the academic team.

Tips for Youth Engagement

1. Show youth co-researchers that you value their participation. Offer financial compensation, reimbursement for expenses, and recognition. Demonstrate respect for their ideas.
2. Agree on concrete responsibilities and deadlines, as youth peer researchers may need more direction than older peer researchers.
4. Help youth build capacity over time. Youth may require time and support to build their confidence and abilities. Longer project timelines can help.
5. Be flexible in meeting youth needs. Accept that youth priorities may differ from the academic team.
6. Recognize that peer researchers may rely on your services, and the ethical implications of that.

References


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