

School for Public Health Research

Working with vulnerable young people in qualitative research: What are the challenges and how can these be addressed?



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For further information about the project, please contact Dr Angela Beattie (Email: Angela.Beattie@bristol.ac.uk) or visit our project website on: <http://www.bris.ac.uk/social-community-medicine/projects/breakthrough-mentoring>

The context

Mentoring schemes are increasingly being used as a way of working with vulnerable and marginalised groups and have been suggested as a way of improving a young person's health, well-being and educational outcomes. However, the evidence base for youth mentoring programmes is weak. Due to the recent increase in mentoring schemes in the UK, there is a need to evaluate the effectiveness of youth mentoring programmes for young people in secondary schools.

The **Breakthrough mentoring research study** is a NIHR SPHR funded project that aims to evaluate the Breakthrough mentoring scheme by conducting a feasibility and pilot RCT to explore whether mentoring can help vulnerable young people. A qualitative process evaluation and a cost analysis are being conducted alongside the pilot trial in order to help explore the feasibility of collecting data and inform the parameters needed to design a definitive RCT.

Two of the **key research questions** are:

- **Can we collect quantitative and qualitative data from participants at all three follow-up time (6, 12 & 18 months) points?**
- **How acceptable is the invention and the trial procedures to the participants?**

The info

Twenty-one young people aged 11-16 years currently attending secondary school and deemed at risk of exclusion from school have been recruited into our feasibility RCT trial (n=11 intervention, n=10 control). The participants allocated to the intervention group have received Breakthrough mentoring in the last school year (2013/2014). Breakthrough mentoring sessions are activity focused and provide young people with an guiding adult mentor.

We are currently at the stage of conducting the 12 months follow-ups with all study participants which involves a **qualitative in-depth interview** and the **completion of a questionnaire**. The 12 month follow up will explore how young people have been getting on over the previous six months, explore any changes in school/life, the experiences of young people with regard to the mentoring and the end of mentoring, and current support received.

The question(s)

Previous qualitative work with our study participants has highlighted various aspects of the challenging nature of research interviews with vulnerable young people in research, including the following:

- Phasing in and out of interviews*
- Monosyllabic answers*
- Being unsure about their contribution to the project*
- Revealing risk behaviours information which has had to be passed onto the school for safeguarding purposes*
- Not knowing/forgetting what to say*
- Wanting to talk about own life events, not research questions*
- Limited concentration span*
- Turning up late/Forgetting to turn up to follow-up meetings*

How can we best address these challenges when interviewing young people in research? Have you made similar experiences in your research? What are your views on carrying out qualitative research with vulnerable young people?

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