

Dirty dishes Are Never
just
Dirty Dishes!



Using Creative Ethnographic Methods to
Make Visible Unpaid Caregiver
Experience With a View to Improving
Caregiver Access to Counselling Support

Research Methods and Practice - ECPR7004
Kalindi Black - 1704111



Why Caregiver Research?

Carer Mental and Physical Health is under-researched and evaluation of support services is missing
(Sanders, 2020)

10.6 Million unpaid Carers in the UK
(Carers UK, 2022)

**No. of unpaid carers predicted to rise by 27%
By 2041**
(Poertier, 2023)

81% of carers are women
75% Juggle caring with work
(Carers UK, 2024)

4% carers say their Mental Health is good
27% say their Mental Health is very bad
(Carers UK, 2023,)

79% carers feel stressed or anxious
49% feel depressed
50% feel lonely
(Carers UK, 2023)



Carers are asking for better help

“I want to see a future where I can have easy access to someone to talk to when I feel stressed out and feel I can’t carry on

“Carers generally don’t have time for themselves, existing not living and that’s not right”

“I want to see a future for carers where you don’t have to break down or be in crisis to get help”

“I want to see a future where we are seen and heard ... and our mental, emotional and physical health is looked after a lot more”

“I want to see a future where carers don’t feel backed into a corner – providing care without proper support”

(Carers UK



Why the Multi-Cultural and Social Justice Counselling (MCSJ) Paradigm?

- Described as the 5th force in Counselling
- Comes from a social justice and advocacy paradigm rather than being value neutral
- Takes into account socio/cultural and political barriers that exist for clients whilst considering systemic change of the environment alongside clients' inner experience

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Why Creative Ethnography ?

"Ethnographers take mundane objects, spaces, and events that are often passed over, and illuminate the hidden, taken for granted stories that lie within them. Imagine a pile of dirty dishes in a kitchen sink For many of us, they are just domestic work needing to be done, yet those dishes tell stories about the lives of others. An ethnographer, attuned to her senses might perceive the stories that lie behind those dirty dishes ... a story of a tragic accident, a hurtful fight, too much drinking, or a broken plate accidentally dropped or purposefully thrown. Or the story of a single woman working three jobs to feed her kids with no time left to wash the dishes and a failing economic system that punishes the poor ... Or a story of depression or grief and their paralyzing effect on the will to get out of bed ...

Dirty dishes might tell any one of many complicated stories. Dishes are never just Dishes"

(Elliot, 2017, pp.36)



Examples of Ethnography in Counselling Research



The Making of Psychotherapists: An Anthropological Analysis (2009)
Sedated: How modern capitalism created our mental health crisis (2021) - James Davies



“I think its quite an insulting question, “What is it like to be white? ...it doesn’t need to be asked” : An exploration of how white trainee counsellors in South Wales understand “race”, racism and whiteness (2021) – Ruth Smith



A Qualitative Study of School Counselling in Barbados: A Focused Ethnography (2021)
- Dominiqua Griffin and Julia Bryan



‘Determining counselling communication strategies associated with successful outcomes in the National Health Service community pharmacy Stop Smoking programme in East London: a focused ethnography using recorded consultations’,(2017)



Examples of Ethnography Counselling Research



Origins of Creative Ethnography

- Sensory and Creative Ethnographic Methods grew out of Applied Anthropology
- Applied Anthropology takes a collaborative and interdisciplinary approach using anthropological theory and methods to seek practical, interventions or solutions to human problems. It advocates for positive social change
- Research is not value neutral or objective, having a future based perspective with solutions co-created by researchers working with a community rather than being hierarchically imposed
- Researchers are recognised as active participants their identities, assumptions and bias visible in the research process as they shape and contribute to findings and outcomes



Creative Methods

- ☆ Initial informal Interviews and 1 day of Deep Hanging Out
- ☆ Digital Methods — twice daily texts (single word or sentences) — might include vlogs, songs or sound recordings, use of images, drawings, photographs or poetry to capture and express caregiver experience of their role
- ☆ Creative online focus group sharing common focus and voice experience and co create solutions
- ☆ Weekly phone check in
- ☆ Online focus group sharing findings, checking representations and collaborating on ways to present research in ways that benefit the community



Challenges and Limitations

Potential Challenges

Access to community and building trust takes time – ethnographic methods are labour and time intensive at all stages of the research

Collaborators concerns about research agenda , anonymity and confidentiality – potential for collaborators to withdraw from research process

Quantity of complex messy, variable data to synthesize

Identities within communities are not homogenous – how to balance and equally represent opposing/differing voices

Ethnographer must decide to what extent the findings represent collaborators

Sharing findings in a way that benefits community – not just researcher or academy – eg community/local organisations, local or national govt,

Ethical consideration – research methods may inadvertently produce relationships and create dependence/vulnerability

Online disinhibition effect through use of digital methods– researcher invited into personal space of collaborator potentially leaving collaborator feeling vulnerable/exposed

Potential Limitations

Selection Bias – rural Welsh population and experiences may not be diverse

Small sample size and the risk of generalisations rather than recognising unique needs

May not gain as much access to the community as the research process requires

Caregivers may be too busy to engage fully with the research

Collaborators concerned about the research agenda may lie, change their stories or misrepresent themselves, their or the community

Are the researcher interpretations or representations of the community valid?

Ethnography takes a narrative approach – the research is considered subjective and biased to positive experiences limiting credibility and reach of the research



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