

Recruiting ethnically minoritized male students for a mental health research project

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Recruiting ethnically minoritized male students for a mental health research project.

Claire Wolstenholme, July 2023

The project beginnings

As part of a 6-month seconded role in STEER, I had the opportunity to meet Ursula Klingel (Head of Wellbeing Service) and Jozef Sen (Lead Wellbeing Practitioner) to discuss research into male student mental health at SHU. I had recently completed an EdD in this area and was keen to further develop this work. The wellbeing team explained that they had seen a continuous underutilisation of the service from ethnically minoritized male students and wanted to understand the reasons for this, with a view to service improvement.

Jozef and I decided to conduct a scoping investigation, undertaking qualitative research, we aimed to give a voice to this demographic of male students about how they felt about mental health services at university.

Listening Rooms for data collection

Jozef suggested using the award winning [Listening Rooms](#) method to undertake this research. This involves participants taking part in a fairly naturalistic conversation with a friend based on talking points and prompts created by the research team. With no researcher present, this enables a more unbiased and free flow of talk without potential power dynamics. Conversations are recorded, transcribed and then analysis is undertaken through the Listening Rooms [Round table](#) discussion, which includes the full project team and other internal and external stakeholders.

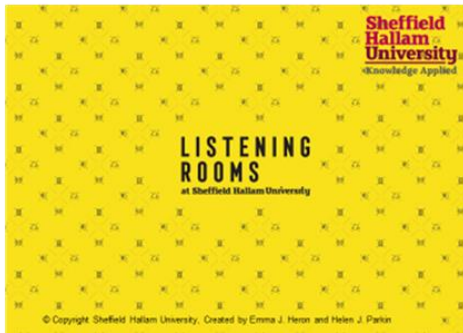
Working with student community researchers, Ali Ladiwala and Rommel Gangopadhyay (masters students with lived experience of being ethnically minoritized male students) we created the talking points and prompts for the conversations. These centred around awareness of the SHU wellbeing support services, and the barriers and facilitators to potentially using this service for mental health support.

Recruiting our target group

We worked with the STEER Graduate Intern, Iqra Memon, to design the project [webpage](#), email and advertisement, and were ready to 'go live' with recruitment by late April 23. We were cautioned that given the time of year (many students have left for summer) and more specifically, the target audience, we were unlikely to get many, if any participants.

Iqra and Jozef publicised the project, starting with a soft launch where details of the research and the sign-up link were sent to key staff members to publicize, including Student Support Services, Students Union, and the lead for Departmental Minoritized Student Groups.

Crucially, with help from the [SPI team](#), we were able to get special characteristic data, including contact information for all the male students currently studying at Hallam, who identified as minority ethnic on entry. This meant we were able to send a targeted email with the advertisement to every student who fit the inclusion criteria, inviting them to partake. This approach has been used



previously, and so despite this being an ideal way to ensure prospective participants were aware of this opportunity, we were still only cautiously optimistic.

The overwhelming response

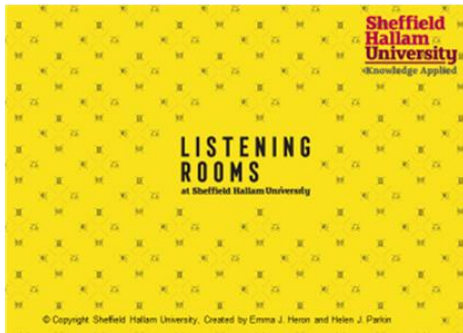
We received 72 inquiries in the first 24 hours of emails being sent to students. Overall, we received over 100 inquiries from students about taking part in this project. This is more inquiries than any other Listening Rooms project. Iqra diligently replied to each inquiry with further information and to check participants a) met the criteria and b) were happy and willing to take part, before arranging the conversations to take place. A total of 14 conversations took place, meaning 28 total participants.

Factors facilitating participation.

Although we would love to share the secret ingredients to successful recruitment, the number of inquiries not only far surpassed our expectations, but none of us knows exactly why. We can however share what we think has helped:

- Having Iqra (the STEER Graduate Intern) has been invaluable. Iqra worked with Jozef and me in the design and creation of documentation and handled all enquiries and the setting up of conversations.
- The ability to send out targeted and personalised invites based on accurate student demographic data.
- The first line of the email invite asked, '*Do you identify as an ethnically minoritized male student?*' We know that individuals may identify as different genders or ethnicities than those they were born, and therefore this question asks if they feel they fit the criteria before deciding to open the email and read on. From my research experience with male student participants, and Jozef's experience as a Wellbeing Practitioner, we know that students feel a targeted and more personal approach means they are much more likely to want to engage in the research than something perceived to be generic and easily ignored. In addition, students take guidance from their 'trusted' person(s) so when we have named staff/ services disseminating information to targeted students, it facilitates their participation.
- We made it clear on all project documentation that participants did not have to have experienced mental ill-health, or even have heard of the SHU Wellbeing Support Services to take part.
- Listening Rooms projects have a fantastic reputation both inside and outside of the university, having recently won the [student experience award](#) at the Guardian awards 2020. The Listening Rooms team, Emma Heron and Helen Parkin have been hugely supportive and instrumental in the undertaking of this project. Listening Rooms also has continued institutional funding to offer a £20 voucher for each participant.
- The collaboration between myself as researcher and Jozef as practitioner has given this project a 'Pracademic' element where we have been open to avenues, and connections that would otherwise not have been possible. Working with Ali and Rommel on the design of the Prompts has also been immensely valuable, offering insights we would not have considered. They will also take part in the round table analysis.

Round table analysis



The round table analysis took place in late July with individuals with an academic interest in this area, and those in positions to implement change in the university. Findings will be shared soon on the listening rooms page, and can be sent on request, and a more in-depth analysis of the data is due to take place in the coming months.

For more information on Listening Rooms please contact: listeningrooms@shu.ac.uk