

- Title: 'Read this, it's good for you!' Using qualitative methodologies to explore service user needs and strategic aims.
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Abstract

This paper aims to produce a comprehensive analysis of the use of qualitative methods to investigate consumer health information and treatment schemes in UK public libraries. It posits the need to examine both the strategic aims of the schemes, alongside the experiences of the service users, to identify gaps between perceived service provision and service user needs. The paper explores this qualitative methodology in the context of the more typical quantitative user statistics, and demonstrates that using qualitative methods can help to identify areas for improvement in services. The paper focuses on the use of interview analysis, participant observation and document analysis. The importance of including the voice of the service user in service design and delivery has grown in the UK in recent years, and this paper explores one method of ensuring that this occurs, within a context that enables service providers to think reflectively about their aims, objectives and implementation.

The methods discussed in this paper contribute to an ongoing research project into the impact of bibliotherapy schemes within public libraries. Bibliotherapy schemes are part of a wider UK government initiative to provide information, treatment choices and increase self-care management for long-term conditions. This paper provides a situated analysis of the use of qualitative methodologies in the evaluation of healthcare information provision, focussing on bibliotherapy schemes to provide practical examples of the relevance and importance of such methods. The identification of gaps between strategic aims and service user experiences can help to provide new ideas for service improvement and ensure that continual evaluation of service provision is conducted.

Focusing on a more inclusive analysis can aid health information specialists by creating a locally-situated piece of research that emphasises a variety of perspectives and allows service provision to be service-user led. In this case, the views of service users with long-term mental health conditions will aid the development of a more robust model of bibliotherapeutic practice. This paper also engages with the wider interdisciplinary debates concerned with service evaluation, examining their role in the provision of health information. It encourages healthcare information providers and librarians to think more widely about the performance indicators they utilise and encourages a more in-depth approach to service evaluation to ensure improvements in services are linked to service user needs.