
EVALUATING PSYCHOSOCIAL INITIATIVES FOR PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA: KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

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MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

Cautionary note:

- Not a step by step guide on how to evaluate psychosocial initiatives for people with dementia and their family carers
- Not focusing on outcomes measures

PSYCHOSOCIAL INITIATIVES

Defined as:

‘physical, cognitive or social activities that may maintain or improve functioning, interpersonal relationships and well-being’ (McDermott et al., 2018: 1)

- Synonymous with non-pharmacological interventions?
- Person with dementia; Caregiver support and training
- Wide-ranging – Correct classification (Keogh et al., 2018)
- Initiative or intervention, programme, policy, service, supports?



EVALUATION

- A form of applied research
- Systematic, data-based process for judging the value of an initiative
- Creates information about key activities and processes
- Helps to inform decision-making



COMPLEXITY

Dementia is complex

Psychosocial initiatives are ‘complex interventions’

- Often have multiple components
- Components change over time
- Implemented differently
- Very different to narrow, fixed, static interventions

Implications for evaluation:

- ‘controlling for’ or ‘attending to’ complexity?
(Greenhalgh and Papoutsi, 2018)



MOST COMMON TYPES OF EVALUATION

- Formative evaluation
- Process / implementation evaluation
- Outcomes / effectiveness evaluation
- Impact evaluation

Also economic evaluation

'ACCIDENTAL' EVALUATION

- Term coined by King and Volkov (2005)
- Happens where
 - Requirement to conduct an evaluation
- And where
 - Little or no formal training in evaluation
 - Attitudes towards evaluation are negative
 - Preference to prioritise users of intervention or service
- Different types of evidence generated by evaluation
- Rush to outcomes measures, which can dominate / overwhelm

EVALUATION: AN AFTERTHOUGHT?

- Evaluation – an integral part of programme development
- Have evaluation in mind when developing (or adopting / adapting) an intervention / programme
- Helps ensure success of evaluation
- An evaluation plan is critical
 - Preparing programme for evaluation

DEVELOPING AND EVALUATING COMPLEX INTERVENTIONS

- Intervention itself is critical to the evaluation
- MRC guidance (Craig et al., 2008) describes four discrete phases: Developing, Feasibility / Piloting, Evaluation, Implementation
- In practice, variety of approaches to intervention development (O’Cathain et al., 2019)
- Each approach has its own strengths and limitations
- Evaluation can take on a different guise depending on approach used for intervention development

THEORY OF CHANGE

- Explains how the activities undertaken by the initiative contribute to a chain of results that lead to intended or observed impacts
- Usually developed at planning stage
- As theory of change is developed:
 - appropriate evaluation questions developed
 - appropriate designs developed
 - decisions about what data to collect taken
- Can be reviewed and revised

THE INTERVENTION / INITIATIVE

Interventions that
are very well-defined
with clear boundaries



Interventions that
are high complex and
'messy'; i.e. emergent
and dynamic



RCT or comparison
group study design

DATA AND MEASUREMENTS

Have clearly defined and prioritised data and measurement plans

‘Don’t try to measure everything or your project will be weighted down by the evaluation’

(Trisha Greenhalgh, 2018)

Attribution - extent to which measured improvement results from the initiative

INTERVENTION IMPLEMENTATION

- Implementation of the intervention is also critical to the evaluation
- Intervention's reach and effectiveness are affected by its implementation
- E.g. fidelity – degree to which the intervention is implemented as intended

Strong focus on
implementation
fidelity



Allows adaptation
and tailoring to
context

CONTEXT MATTERS

- Evaluations are highly situational
- Context is central in all evaluations
- Challenges of context inescapably present in all evaluations
- Meanings, dimensions, role it plays vary

Source of influence
to be controlled,
e.g. RCTs



Inevitable and rich
source of explanatory
influences of desired
programme
outcomes



KEY MESSAGES

- Value and embrace complexity
- Plan for ‘intentional’ (not ‘accidental’) evaluation
- Evaluation is an integral part of programme development
- Be clear about approach used for intervention development (and how evaluation fits in)
- Describe clearly the intervention



KEY MESSAGES

- Agree on a Theory of Change
- Don't try to measure everything
- Consider how implementation affects evaluation
- Context matters
- Foster evaluative thinking (from the start)



THANK YOU

QUESTIONS?

