

Winner of the AskFuse 10th anniversary seed corn funding 2023

Exploring perceived barriers to accessing specialist drug and alcohol carer services: Perspectives of carers from British South Asian community in an urban area in the Northeast of England

Why was this research done?

There is very little research into the effect, and extent, of support received by people caring for family members who use drugs or alcohol, within the British South Asian community. British South Asian people are under-represented in family support services.

This project aimed to explore the perceptions of British South Asian carers regarding specialist drug and alcohol carer services, both at a local and regional level.

How was the research carried out?

During interviews, three carers discussed their experiences of accessing services for carers. They described their understanding of drug use and treatment; the community perceptions of drug use and treatment; and their own perceptions of drug and alcohol treatment.

What were the results of the research?

- The topic of drug and alcohol use was often not spoken about in the community. This meant that people caring for, and parenting, people who use drugs and/or alcohol, felt unable to talk about it and receive support. There is an increase in conversations happening, however, especially amongst the younger generation.
- Stigma within the community was noted as a barrier to discussing drug and alcohol use and accessing support.
- Those who had accessed anonymous family support services spoke positively of their experience and how confidentiality was maintained. They were concerned however, that carers who have not yet accessed a service may fear doing so, due to perceived concerns around confidentiality being broken and shared with community members.

- Participants reported often feeling a pressure to provide recovery support themselves without expertise when those they care for did not access treatment.
- Those who had accessed to specialist drug and alcohol carer services spoke highly of how practitioners came to them, met them in the community, and adapted to their needs and comfort levels.

It was difficult to find research participants who wanted to be involved, even when seeking participants through specialist carer services. This meant that there were limited perspectives presented in the results. Nevertheless, the carers involved in the research made valuable contributions to this important issue.

Key recommendations from this research:

- There is a need for family support services and groups to connect with South Asian community leaders. This is due to the fact they are often the first point of call for community drug and alcohol cases and will often be the ones to signpost to other services. Creating strong networks with community leaders and imams may reduce stigma and distrust due to the influential status of leaders and imams in the community. This may also increase knowledge of recovery within the community and create a more visible recovery community.
- To make family support services and pre-existing groups more visible in the community. This will enable those caring for people using drugs and/or alcohol to receive support and lessen the burden of providing psychosocial intervention themselves.
- Confidentiality, which is already maintained in the services, should be emphasized to the community to reassure them that their privacy will remain protected when they use the services.
- Accessing services in local community centres and mosques may be a way to reduce stigma and distrust.

How have these research findings been used?

PROPS applied for a small grant to visit a service in Leicester to explore how their family service supports South Asian Muslim (SAM) families. They met with a female group who shared what issues they face within their families, what they want from a service, and what they don't want from a service.

Since, and probably also because of, the research we been able to raise awareness in the community of the PROPS service offer and have been asked to talk to families attending the Bangladeshi Association.

Newcastle City Council Public Health team have also funded a post for a SAM Community Connector with the PROPS service who as well as extending our existing 'Chat and Connect' group from one group to three, organised an Eid celebration in April this year to which people from any community were invited to celebrate Eid, community and charity, with PROPS and the SAM community. This event also served to raise awareness of the community and provided a place for people to ask questions.

Who will find the recommendations useful?

People concerned about unequal access to health for people from ethnically minoritised groups, and people involved in substance use support services, service commissioners and policy makers will find this research useful.

Who carried out the research?

The research team involved Fuse members who worked together across different local authority, voluntary and university sectors to co-produce the research. AskFuse would like to thank: PROPs North East (Helen Thompson Chief Executive Office/CEO), Newcastle City Council (Michael Cave Senior Public Health Practitioner and Claire Batey Public Health Practitioner) and Northumbria University (Lydia Lochhead Senior Research Assistant and Dr Zeb Sattar Principal Investigator and Assistant Professor).

AskFuse and the research team would like to thank all the participants who took part in this study.

Who funded this study?

In November 2023, AskFuse provided seed corn competition funding (£1000). This research project was approved by the Ethics Committee at Northumbria University (Project Reference Number: 4770). All ethical protocols were followed in the collecting of data. The research was carried out between November 2023 and April 2024.

There is more information about Fuse and AskFuse here: <https://fuse.ac.uk/askfuse/>

For more information please

Jayne Black Public Health Officer, Harm Reduction and Social Inclusion, Public Health Directorate, Newcastle City Council has written a Fuse blog based on the research: "It's not something that you just openly discuss" - Supporting British South Asian carers affected by drug and alcohol use. <http://fuseopenscienceblog.blogspot.com/2025/07/its-not-something-that-you-just-openly.html>

For more information, please email: Dr Zeb Sattar (Assistant Professor, Northumbria University) zeb.sattar@northumbria.ac.uk

If you, or someone you care for, need more information about services that can help with drug or alcohol use, please contact:

PROPS: Specialist Family Drug and Alcohol Service: Telephone: 0191 226 3440

<https://props.org.uk/>



PROPS Community Connector, Fatema Rahman (centre) with PROPS colleagues Annette Walby (left) and Helen Thompson (right), celebrating Eid at Fenham Library 2025.