

Sociology of Mental Health Study Group AGM 12th September 2013

The meeting was run by co-convenor Angela Cotton with Study Group member Patsy Staddon, attended by six members. The agenda was outlined, and the meeting commenced with a brief explanation of the Study Group aims and review of events to date. This included the recent day symposium, organised by Lydia Lewis:

‘What does sociology need to contribute towards or against the wellbeing agenda?’

This was held on Monday 10th June 2013 at the BSA Meeting Room, Imperial Wharf, London. The purpose of event was to provide a space for critical sociological discussion of the current UK government ‘wellbeing’ agenda and its implications. Five papers were presented which considered critical, ethical and political perspectives, with opportunity to explore and discuss sociological implications for mental health and ‘well-being’.

Discussion of membership followed, and meeting attendees were given the opportunity to join the Group through providing their contact details and areas of interest for the members’ web site list, if they were not existing members.

The agenda moved to the academic presentation, with the introduction of Patsy Staddon. The presentation focussed upon a recent publication by Patsy and colleagues, ‘Mental Health Service Users in Research’. This edited book, a collection of papers developed directly from a Seminar Series hosted by the Study Group, was presented as an exemplar of how sociological activity of the group resulted in a tangible and valued outcome. The presentation was well received, and was followed by a thoughtful discussion around the on-going development of service user involvement in mental health research.

The next matter for discussion was the role of co-convenor for the group. This is currently undertaken by Lydia Lewis and Angela Cotton. Lydia, as the founder of the group has been in the role throughout, with a changing co-convenor every two or three years. This was presented as an effective way of involving new people and ideas, whilst keeping continuity. The matter of future co-convenors was then raised, and AC explained that a possible candidate had come forward – Dina Poursanidou. Dina was unable to attend today but did leave some background biographical information about herself. She is a researcher at Manchester University with interests in service user / survivor research and is a member of the Editorial Group for Asylum, the magazine for democratic psychiatry. It was suggested that if anyone else was interested in the role, then they should email AC or LL and then a more formal decision-making process would be undertaken.

Some of the issues from last year’s AGM were followed up, namely the encouragement of more international research collaboration. This issue was explored further, and it was raised that the Study Group Convenors had endeavoured to circulate internationally orientated events and materials, and did have an international membership. One suggestion was made that we look into holding an event specifically aimed at international audiences. A possible subject focus for this could be ‘The Experiences of Family and Carers of People who are Service Users’.

The discussion was opened to comments and questions from attendees. Further possibilities for events were explored, with one suggestion for a focus upon self-harm. Another area of discussion was that we could have a blog for the Study Group,

with the intention of people sharing their ideas and current research. These will be followed up by the co-convenors to scope feasibility.

The meeting drew to a close, with AC and PS thanking the attendees for their contributions.

For further information about the Sociology of Mental Health Study Group, please see our web site: www.britsoc.co.uk/MedSoc/MedSocMentalHealth.aspx.