Exploring how Experts by Experience Can Contribute to an Accessible and Effective Social Service System

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Abstract

Experts by experience (EbE), which are defined as individuals with lived experiences of health, mental health or social care service use, are increasing in popularity within the organizations and institutions providing these services. Due to an enhanced insight in situations of service users, they are increasingly active in both service provision and policy creation. This research hones in on the activities of experts by experience within the context of support service provision for people living in poverty/material deprivation and/or with problematic debt in the city of Leeuwarden, Netherlands. How do their activities facilitate accessible support to service users? How can they be used to improve the social service system? What are the main barriers limiting them from adding value? This research aims to assess why and how their contributions to social services regarding poverty support and alleviation are relevant and how they can be employed to improve social service systems.

Introduction

The concept ''éxperts by experience'' (EbE) has gained popularity in the past years due to the shift in perspective that recognizes the value of the unique insights and contributions that individuals with lived experience of certain situations have to offer in various fields of social care (Rosier & Hadley, 2018). People with lived experiences are seen as experts because the personal experiences they have gathered provide them with a unique understanding that can be valuable in supporting service users in similar situations and for shaping policies and practices. These insights brought by EbE can be particularly useful in fields where understanding of an individual's situation through lived experiences can lead to provision of more effective and empathetic care (Rosier & Hadley, 2018).

Defining ''Experts by Experience''

There are two main ways to define experts by experience. First off, an expert by experience can be defined as *''someone who has personal, lived experience of using health, mental health, or social care services, or of caring for someone who uses those services.''* (Hollins, 2019). Another definition is *"An expert by (direct) experience is someone who has had direct experience of living with a particular diagnosis or status, and of receiving care, support and/or treatment as well as the potential exposure to restrictive interventions aimed at minimising or managing those behaviours which may have been presented during periods of crisis or distress"* (Hollins, 2019).

Thus, the term ''expert by experience'' has two leading definitions. The first definition encapsulates individuals who have lived under a certain circumstance for which they have received care services, but also individuals who have cared for people using these services. The second definition only recognizes individuals who have personal experience with living under a certain condition or in a certain situation for which they have used social care services. For the purpose of this study, the definition of EbE as someone who has had direct experience of living in a certain situation will be used, based on Hollins' (2019) second definition.

EbE with direct experience of a condition or situation are described to have the following trait: *"As a result of this lived experience they possess a unique insight and understanding that allows them to think, feel and act in ways that brings an 'added value' to whatever form of partnership working they are engaged in"* (RRNCoP, 2019: 11). Thus, EbE have unique insights or understanding due to their lived experiences. This places value on the experience the person brings to work by having tacit knowledge which they have acquired through this experience (Hollins, 2019).

Furthermore, EbE exist in a multitude of different contexts. For example, there are EbE who have lived experience in the context of receiving healthcare services, mental health issues, and social care services (CQC, 2023). EbE with lived experience within the context of social care services include individuals living with debt, poverty, or addiction (CQC, 2023). Within this research, the focus will be on EbE who have experience with poverty and/or problematic debt. Although many of the participants of this research have experienced other issues besides material deprivation (e.g. drug use, mental health), the emphasis will be on their experience regarding poverty and debt, and how they can help others through these experiences.

The Increase in Popularity of Experts by Experience

The perspectives of EbE are increasingly being considered and implemented as valuable assets in interventions aimed at alleviating poverty due to a human-centered approach (Rosier & Hadley, 2018). Their lived experiences allow for an understanding of the complex nature of poverty and the interplay of social, economic, and structural factors that contribute to it. This builds trust and solidarity within communities, which may lead to more effective and sustainable solutions (Rosier & Hadley, 2018).

Due to the recent rise in recognition of EbE, the academic literature has also increased in fields like mental health, addiction, and homelessness (Videmšek & Fox, 2018). However, there is still a lack of scientific research about the involvement of EbE in social services, particularly within the context of material deprivation and/or poverty. By addressing these knowledge gaps, we can gain deeper insights in the potential of EbE to transform social services, ultimately advancing the goal of social service organizations.

The Purpose of this Research

  The purpose of this research is to examine the ways in which EbE deliver support to service users, why their interventions facilitate accessible support for individuals experiencing material deprivation and debt, and how their input can contribute to the framework of social service organizations aimed at supporting people living in poverty/material deprivation and/or with problematic debt. For that reason, the research question of this study is: *"How can EbE contribute to an accessible and effective social service system?"*

  The scope of this paper is EbE with direct lived experience of poverty/material deprivation, including problematic debt, who deliver support services to individuals who are living in poverty/material deprivation and/or with problematic debt, within the municipality of Leeuwarden, Netherlands. However, we expect that the observations made in this context and region can be applied to the EbE model in other areas and countries as well, especially within the context of poverty.

Overview of the Rest of this Paper

  The rest of this paper is structured in six more chapters. Chapter two will consist of a literature review. This literature review will present the existing knowledge about EbE and what they are able to do, an overview of material deprivation, the complications service users experience with former social service systems, and the abilities of EbE. Chapter three will discuss the methods that have been used to conduct the interviews and the thematic analysis method that has been used to analyze the data and build results. Chapter four will contain the results of the thematic analysis. Chapter five will contain the discussion, in which the interpretation of the results and their implications will be discussed. And finally, chapter six will conclude this paper by summarizing the paper, its findings, the implications of those findings, and suggestions for future research.

Literature review

An Overview of Poverty, Material Deprivation, and Problematic Debt

Definitions of Poverty and Material Deprivation

Poverty is defined as the state of lacking usual or socially acceptable amounts of money or possessions (Britannica, 2024). More specifically, one is considered to be in poverty if they are unable to satisfy their basic needs. These needs can be narrowly defined as "means necessary for survival", or more broadly as "those reflecting the standard of living within a community" (World bank, 2023). Poverty is about more than just a lack of income. It encompasses a range of different socioeconomic dimensions, including the ability to access services and social protection measures, social status, decent work, and opportunities (United Nations, N.D.). Poverty is closely related to material deprivation, but material deprivation is defined differently.

Material deprivation refers to a state of economic strain and durables, defined as the enforced inability (rather than the choice not to do so) to pay unexpected expenses, afford a one-week annual holiday away from home, a meal involving meat, chicken or fish every second day, the adequate heating of a dwelling, durable goods like a washing machine, color television, telephone or car, being confronted with payment arrears (mortgage or rent, utility bills, hire purchase installments or other loan payments) (World Bank, 2020). In a broader sense, material deprivation refers to the inability of individuals or households to afford those consumption goods and activities that are typical in a society at a given point in time, irrespective of people's preferences with respect to these items. It is a direct measure of poverty derived from the lack of items and activities deemed to be necessary for an acceptable standard of living (United Nations, 2023).

When individuals or households do not have enough income or means to cover their basic needs, they may resort to borrowing money to make ends meet. This can lead to a cycle of debt as they struggle to repay what they owe plus interest (Kuypers & Marx, 2021). Moreover, people living in poverty often have little or no savings. Therefore, unexpected expenses such as medical bills or car repairs can lead to debt (Kuypers & Marx, 2021). Vice versa, high levels of debt can lead to a significant portion of income being used for debt repayment. It can even lead to further borrowing of money, exacerbating the debt people are in. This leaves less money available for essential goods and services, leading to material deprivation (UNDP, 2023). Within the context of this study, most of the individuals living in material deprivation or poverty are those plagued with problematic debt, and it is due to this debt that they are living in material deprivation or poverty (Kuypers & Marx, 2021).

The Social Determinants of Health

Poverty is closely related to the social determinants of health, which are the non-medical factors that influence health outcomes. The social determinants of health include the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, as well as the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life (Chung, 2016). Poverty, as a social determinant, has a profound impact on health outcomes. It is a major cause of ill health and a barrier to accessing health care when needed (World Bank, 2014). This relationship is related to multiple factors associated with poverty, such as lack of information on appropriate health-promoting practices or lack of voice needed to make social services work for them (World Bank, 2014).

Poverty can be a barrier to accessing health care when needed through lack of resources to obtain health information (Svendsen et al., 2020). For example, Poverty be the cause of a lack of education, which can be a cause of health illiteracy. Health literacy is the ability of individuals to access, understand, and use health-related information and services to make informed decisions about their health (Svendsen et al., 2020). The cumulative effects of limited resources, limited access to services, and limited opportunities can lead to inequitable health outcomes (Svendsen et al., 2020).

Social Service Institutions and Their Complications

The dutch Social Service System

      The government and social institutions in the Netherlands offer various aid programs to support people living in situations of material deprivation, who are looking for a way to get rid of debts. For instance, the government may develop policies that are targeted at poverty reduction or provide direct financial or social assistance to individuals living in poverty (Jonker et al., 2021). Sometimes, governments fund municipalities to create financial or social service networks. These municipal programs offer initiatives such as debt-prevention courses, lifestyle programs, or buddy systems (Jonker et al., 2021).

      Next to governmental aid targeted at reducing poverty, individuals who are living in situations of material deprivation may also look for help at social service institutions. In the context of this study, social institutions such as organizations aimed at helping people who are facing hardships such as poverty, social exclusion, or mental illness are meant (Pinker, 2024). Individuals living in poverty might look for help at these institutions that offer them help in areas such as housing, finances, mental functioning, and paying off debts (Pinkster, 2017).

Barriers to the Accessibility of Social Service Institutions

      Despite the existence of a good framework of institutions and programs in the Netherlands targeted at providing support to those living in poverty and/or material deprivation, there are multiple barriers for people in need of support to acquire help. Firstly, individuals experience barriers to the accessibility of social service institutions when there is a lack of transparency (Singh, 2021). When an institution is transparent, there is clarity about the rules, processes, plans, and actions (Singh, 2021). This may for instance mean transparency about decision-making process, policies, or policy outcomes. In some cases, individuals do not know how or where to get help due to a lack of transparency. Without proper transparency, individuals looking for help from these institutions may refrain from asking for help. A lack of transparency may also decrease levels of trust and confidence in these institutions (Singh, 2021).

A lack of confidence and trust in institutions is also a reason people are discouraged from receiving help from them. Especially within social work, trust in professional identity, values, and skills is crucial for building trust with service users (Butler & Drakeford, 2005). Due to an emphasis on systemic operations, social work has developed a dehumanized approach (Butler & Drakeford, 2005). Meaningful, personal interactions have been overshadowed by the reliance on measurable outcomes and targets. This shift towards systemization within social work has led to the role of professional judgment and discretion to be diminished (Butler & Drakeford, 2005). Rule-governed behavior and performance measurement approach to social work undermines the relational trust between social workers and service users (Butler & Drakeford, 2005).

The Abilities and Challenges of Experts by Experience

Existing Research on Experts by Experience

Despite the fact that EbE are increasingly being considered and included in service provision, the increase in academic literature is still somewhat limited about the deployment of EbE within the context of material deprivation. However, due to a similarity in the nature of the support interventions provided by EbE, and the principle of enhanced insights and connection through shared experiences being the same in both fields, literature about EbE in other fields of social care is still relevant.

Van den boom (2018) conducted a research where 15 service users of EbE within the field of mental health were interviewed. The results of the study showed that service users deemed support by EbE to be more accessible. There was an increased sense of equality, and the participants felt more understanding and acknowledgement from EbE than from regular mental healthcare providers.

According to a study conducted by Barker and Maguire (2017) about peer-support among homeless people, peers have a unique ability to connect to those who are socially excluded. Moreover, they have experienced a ''different world'' of isolation and neglect. Through shared experiences such as these, they have the ability to genuinely emphatically connect to peers who are currently undergoing similar situations. By having similar experiences, peer workers can build relationships with service users and develop a mutual trust and understanding with them (Barker & Maguire, 2017).

Results of studies reviewed within the paper by Barker and Maguire (2017) showed that participants experiencing homelessness reported having greater feelings of belonging, and social and emotional support upon receiving peer support. Other effects of the support interventions showed a decrease in days spent homeless, arrests, harm due to addiction to substances, and an increase in physical and mental health. The reviewed papers within this study linked the increase in quality of life to the positive influence the peer workers had on the lives of the homeless peers through positive reinforcement fostered by the shared experiences they had of homelessness, addiction, and mental illness. These shared experiences serve to build trust and rapport, building prosocial relationships that facilitate recovery (Barker & Maguire, 2017).

Keuzenkamp and van Hoorn (2022) conducted a similar study where they reviewed multiple quantitative and qualitative studies to determine in which categories such as mental health, addiction, debt, and medicine use EbE had an impact when supporting peers, and how much impact they had on each category. The study pointed out that EbE had the greatest positive impact on psychosocial aspects, such as feelings of empowerment, feeling understood and accepted, and being hopeful.

Gillard (2019) stated that EbE fulfill a paraclinical role. They do this by supporting people who are undergoing treatment for something they have shared experiences in. It is not the treatment itself EbE can deliver, but they can offer support to those who are undergoing treatment. He states that EbE separate themselves from formal care on the core values peer support relies on: *"grounded in naturally-occuring, real-world interactions between people supporting each other with their emotional distress"* (Gillard, 2019, p. 342). Equal power relations are a key element of peer support and the value of peer support lies in normalization instead of treatment-focused relationships between service users and service providers (Keuzenkamp & van Hoorn, 2022).

McCarthy et al. (2019) conducted a program evaluation of an innovative peer specialist program involving a 9-month intervention consisting of 20 structured and 20 unstructured peer sessions using both EbE and social work professionals for a formerly homeless population. Through qualitative interviews with 20 homeless or formerly homeless participants, eight case managers, and three peer specialists, the study assessed the time, content, and delivery of the program. The findings suggest that a "medium" level of structure, combining both structured and unstructured sessions, is most effective. This approach fosters strong relationships based on shared experiences while maintaining a focus on practical, recovery-oriented activities.

Barriers and Drivers of Experts by Experience

Keuzenkamp & van Hoorn (2019) noted a lack of clarity about the exact activities EbE carried out as the main limitation for their research. It was uncertain if EbE worked alone or in a group, and if they were a substitute for regular care or complimentary to it. The paper ends by giving recommendations for further research. Among other things, the authors recommend that future research should clarify the roles and actions of peer specialists, their distinct contributions, and the conditions under which they are most effective.

A study done by Klee et al. (2019) noted how peer specialists face challenges such as role clarity, organizational support, and appropriate supervision. Successful integration depends on creating a supportive organizational culture, proper training, and sufficient supervision. Role clarity and organizational context are the primary barriers to the successful implementation of support interventions by EbE. Leadership endorsement within an organization is the greatest determinant of the successful integration of EbE (Klee et al., 2019).

Additional barriers include insufficient supervision, inadequate policies regarding confidentiality, and a lack of perceived credibility of peer specialist roles. Furthermore, discrimination and prejudice from non-peer colleagues hinder effective integration (Klee et al., 2019). There is also a significant need for training to enable peer specialists to deliver appropriate support interventions effectively (Klee et al., 2019). EbE have been more successful when their organization acts to create a supportive culture and provides sufficient supervision (Klee et al., 2019)

Methodology

This methods section outlines the two approaches that were used to conduct research on the role and abilities of EbE and how they can be used to improve social service practices in the context of material deprivation, poverty, and debt. Firstly, a literature review was conducted to gain insights into the broader field of EbE, the context of material deprivation, and complications within social care practices. Secondly, semi-structured interviews were conducted with EbE who were working or volunteering in supporting individuals who are currently experiencing poverty, debt, or material deprivation.

Semi-Structured Interviews

This part of the methods section outlines the methodological approach used for conducting semi-structured interviews and a thematic analysis to analyze, extract, and synthesize the data to gain an understanding of the ways in which EbE conduct support interventions, what they can do and why they do it well, and what the implications of this are for social work practices.

Selection Criteria

Participants with lived experience of material deprivation and/or debt who are currently providing to people living in material deprivation or debt were deemed eligible to participate in this research. There was no distinction made between EbE who are employed as EbE or volunteers. In total, five participants were recruited and interviewed.

Participant Recruitment

Participants were recruited through the network of Gezinslab. Gezinslab is a Dutch initiative, located in Leeuwarden, the capital of the Dutch province of Friesland. The organization is aimed at supporting the population of some of Leeuwarden's poorest neighborhoods through collaborative action between among others social workers, EbE, and the population of the neighborhoods. Gezinslab has a total of two locations, based in two neighborhoods. At these locations, EbE work as either volunteers or on an employed basis.

We have been in contact with these organizations, through which participants have been recruited. In this study, initial participants were identified through Gezinslab and were then asked to refer colleagues or acquaintances who met the study's inclusion criteria. Thus, participants of this research have been recruited using snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where existing study participants recruit future participants from among their acquaintances (Parker et al., 2019). This referral process continued until the desired sample size was achieved and final participants did not have further references for potential participants.

Interview Design

A semi-structured interview format was chosen to allow for flexibility in exploring key themes while ensuring consistency across interviews. An interview guide with open-ended questions was designed to gain detailed insights. Key topics of the interview guide included the activities carried out by the participants, what made support interventions by EbE effective, barriers faced by people looking for help from formal care service providers, the difference between EbE and social work professionals, and how EbE can serve as a bridge between social work institutions and service users. The full interview guide can be found in the appendix.

Procedure

The interviews were scheduled at times and locations that suited the participants and were conducted in person. Interviews have been conducted between April 10th 2023 and May 15th 2024. All interviews took place in one of the two locations of Gezinslab, and were held in Dutch. Interviews lasted between 15 and 45 minutes, depending on the depth and length of the answers provided by the participants. The interviews were audio recorded with the participants' consent and were transcribed subsequently in order to be used in the analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Participants provided informed consent before participating in the interviews. They were informed about the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, the potential gains and risks of partaking in the interview, and their right to withdraw at any time without explanation. Measures were taken to ensure participants' confidentiality. Names and all identifying information were removed from or blocked out in the transcripts. The study received ethical approval from the committee overseeing research ethics within our institution.

Thematic Analysis

Because the aim of this research is to gather and analyze personal insights from EbE through semi-structured interviews, a thematic analysis is the right method to extract data and synthesize results (Evans & Lewis, 2018). Thematic analyses are particularly useful when trying to understand people's views, knowledge, or experiences from qualitative datasets such as the interviews that have been conducted (Evans & Lewis, 2018). Through a thematic analysis, the subjective information participants have shared during the interviews can be examined, allowing exploration of complex issues and gathering of detailed information that are hard to examine through other methods, such as quantitative analyses (Evans & Lewis, 2018).

Data Analysis

To analyze the data from the interviews, a thematic analysis has been conducted. This method has been chosen as it is a highly flexible method that can generate valuable insights, especially when there is a lack of previous research to build on (Saunders et al., 2023). Thematic analysis is a qualitative method used to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within data. It provides a systematic approach to handling qualitative information and allows interpretation of various aspects of the research topic (Saunders et al., 2023). As there is limited academic knowledge about EbEs providing support interventions in the context of poverty, data has been analyzed using an inductive approach. This means that themes have been identified directly from the data, without preconceived theories or expectations.

Synthesis of Results

To conduct the thematic analysis, the datasets have been read to familiarize with the topics. Notes have been made to reflect ideas that came up during the reading process. Thereafter, data has been coded from reoccurring patterns within the dataset. After coding the data, notes and codes have been reflected on to develop themes. This process has been repeated until data saturation was achieved.

Results

Introduction

Within the thematic analysis, four first level themes, thirteen second level themes, and seventeen third level themes have been identified. The following thematic analysis will showcase these themes, which encapsulate the following concepts:

Theme I: formal vs informal. In this theme, the differences in approaches between EbE and social workers will be highlighted. Next to that, the idea of EbE serving as an alternative for, or addition to social work professionals will be discussed.

Theme II: *Accessibility*, where the perceived barriers to access to social work professionals due to professionalization will be discussed.

Theme III: *Empathy*, where the connection that EbE can make to service users through empathy will be highlighted.

And ultimately, Theme IV: *Drivers and Barriers*, in which the drivers and barriers to providing successful support services for EbE will be discussed. These include EbE having overcome personal issues, education about social work, and recognition by social work professionals.

Theme I: Formal vs Informal

The service interventions conducted by EbE share many similarities in terms of the contexts and end goals of the support interventions of social work professionals. For this reason, they are often thought of as either an alternative or an addition to formal social care interventions. However, there are several key notions about EbE and their relation to social work that are relevant to this idea. Within this theme, three main subthemes were identified. Firstly, the difference between social work professionals and EbE will be identified. Secondly, the acknowledgement that EbE do not have the full capacity to resolve all issues service users experience will be discussed. Thirdly, the bridge EbE can possibly serve as between social service institutions and the service users will be highlighted.

Theme I A: The difference between EbE and social workers

4.2.1.1 Theme I A 1: Education. The main difference between EbE and professional social workers is the degree of education they have had. To become a professional social worker, a degree of at least university of applied sciences level is required. To become an expert by experience, the main requirement is to have lived experience within the field you wish to become an expert by experience in. Education is not necessarily needed. Although there are specific courses and trainings at lower levels of education that can be taken to get a title of expert by experience, many EbE have not followed them.

"The main difference lies in the diploma one has received. It's at the university of applied sciences. And many experts by experience do not have diplomas. Some do, but some don't."

Theme I A 2: Difference in Support Interventions. Because of this main difference, the differences in the support interventions conducted by social work professionals and EbE respectively also differs. Social work professionals have great knowledge about the methods and procedures needed to conduct a social service intervention, whereas EbE carry out their activities through their lived experiences and practical knowledge about what service users are going through.

"Experts by experience add value from practice, and a social worker has more… they followed an education about it."

Theme I A 3: Integration of Theory and Practice in both Experts by Experience and Social Work Professionals. The difference in education and the resulting differences in structure of the support interventions account for different social service strategies and practices in social work professionals and EbE respectively. However, participants who touched upon this topic have stated that this does not mean that EbE cannot work through theoretical knowledge, nor does that it means that social work professionals cannot work through experience.

      A social worker can have lived experience with the problems they help service users with through personal experience they have gathered throughout certain periods in their lives. This practical experience gathered through specific periods in which one has faced issues is sometimes referred to as a proverbial backpack, signifying the experience that an individual carries with them. Social workers can also build experience about the practicalities of the issues service users face through helping many individuals with these issues throughout the years. Conversely, EbE can build theoretical knowledge about social care methods used by social work professionals from conducting work in the field over the years.

"Social workers can work from theoretical knowledge, but also from practice. They can also have a proverbial backpack."

"Experts by experience typically do not possess this theoretical knowledge, but they can learn it over time. Just not in the beginning"

Theme I B: Experts by Experience's Acknowledgment of Limitations

      Theme I B 1: Differences in Abilities due to Education and Theoretical Knowledge. Due to the differences in education and approach between EbE and social workers highlighted in the paragraph above, there is also a difference in ability both have to provide support interventions to service users. This has been acknowledged by the EbE that participate in this study during the interviews. An example of a difference in abilities between social work professionals and EbE, is the specific theoretical knowledge that social work professionals have of how to achieve a certain goal or get specific results with support interventions.

"If one has studied to become a social worker, they know exactly how it works. And how to achieve it."

"Achieving an actual solution is what a social worker can do in it. We are more of a support thereof."

Theme I B 2: Differences in Powers. Next to having more theoretical knowledge about how to conduct a proper support intervention, social workers also have more powers to provide support to those living in poverty. For instance, if an individual with financial problems wants to be registered with the credit bank in order to gain support to pay off their debts, this can only be done by a registered social worker. Due to this difference in abilities and powers between EbE and social workers, social workers carry a greater responsibility than EbE within the support interventions.

"Social workers can get more done. If you look at social workers who register people at the credit bank, for instance. They have an education. They have a title. So they get more done."

"In the end, the responsibility always lies with the social worker."

Theme I C: Experts by Experience as Bridge between service users and social support organizations

Theme I C 1: Experts by Experience as Bridge between Service Users and Social Service Organizations. Acknowledging the difference in abilities and the limitations EbE have within conducting full social service activities and helping people out of debts from beginning to end, participants in the interviews indicated that EbE can serve as a bridge for people in need of social services to social work institutions. They have the ability to do this because they have practical knowledge about not only the issues that come with material deprivation but also about receiving help from social service institutions and other actors within the social support institutions. Because of this, they can handle people from both sides well.

"I don't have an education whatsoever. I have my experiences and I can handle people from both sides well. That's important about it. That you stay human. And understand both the world of the service users and the formal institutions."

A way in which EbE can directly service users to social service organizations is through speaking to people who come to them to talk about their problems. EbE then assess their cases, sort out what needs to be done, and communicate further with the municipality.

"Within (network center) we have (initiative). The purpose of that initiative is to detect where people get stuck in the system and what needs to be done to get them out. This can happen through cases we get or people who come to speak with us themselves. Then we also try to discuss what needs to be done to solve their situation with the municipality."

Theme I C 2: Preparational Work. Another practical way EbE can provide support to the social care system and the service users in this system, is by doing preparational work. Although EbE have no authority to register people at the credit bank or similar institutions, their practical knowledge about handling debt allows them to sort out documents of service users, fill out forms, and send them to a social work institution which can handle the rest of the procedure. Because of this, EbE can support both future service users and social workers by doing preparational work for social workers, by streamlining administrative processes and organizing necessary documentation.

"We can do a lot of preparational work. We can exactly organize everything so that when they get in contact with a social worker, they can submit it to the credit bank directly, and everything else follows."

Theme II: Accessibility

Within the interviews that have been conducted, it has been reported that users of social support services experience barriers to the accessibility of formal social care services. Due to this perceived lack of accessibility in the support interventions provided by formal social work organizations, people in need of social care services experience difficulty in attaining support services, or cannot optimally profit from them once they have acquired them. This accounts for a low effectiveness and efficiency of support interventions provided by formal social work institutions. This theme of perceived inaccessibility is divided into four subthemes, namely health illiteracy, trust, professionalization of social workers, and unavailability of social service organizations.

Theme II A: Health Literacy

One barrier to the accessibility of social work professionals for people living in material deprivation or with debt, is the formal communication style social work professionals often have. Due to the higher levels of education that social work professionals have typically attained, their vocabulary and use of language are also more professional than that of most of the service users who live in material deprivation. Most of the people who are in need of support interventions regarding poverty and debt have not followed much education, and lack knowledge about professional language and health terms.

As a result of this lack of knowledge and understanding of certain uses of language, most service users have health illiteracy. Health illiteracy is defined as the lack of ability to obtain or understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions (Kickbusch, 2001). Within social care, health illiteracy encompasses difficulty or inability to understand certain terms, follow instructions. This can result in an inability to effectively navigate through social care systems or engage in support interventions, ultimately leading to difficulties in improving one's situation (Kickbusch, 2001).

"Language is especially a barrier. Social workers have all attained higher degrees of education. They speak very formally. If they are speaking to someone who has lived in poverty, and has stagnated because of this, has not followed higher education, their words don't really reach them."

Theme II B: Trust

Theme II B 1: Difficulty Forming a Connection through Perceived Difference in Social Status. Another barrier to the accessibility of professional support interventions provided by social workers that came forward was the low level of trust service users had in social work professionals and the difficulty they perceived in forming a connection with them. For instance, the tonality and use of language of social work professionals sometimes gives service users the feeling that they think they are of higher social status than them. This discourages the service user to even engage in a conversation with the social worker.

"What you also create by speaking in this manner, is that someone might feel, 'this one thinks he's of much higher social status than me. Why would I even engage in conversation with them?'."

Theme II B 2: Distrust in Social Workers due to Their Behavioral Patterns. Another reason service users find difficulty connecting to social work professionals is because they recognize a behavioral pattern in social work professionals that is different from theirs. This behavioral pattern does not connect to individuals living in material deprivation, creating distrust.

"There is a specific behavioral pattern in social workers that does not connect to the living world. This creates distrust. I think that that's a major barrier. "

An example of distrust in social work professionals from service users leading to difficulty in opening up and telling a social worker their issues is due to fear that the social worker has an obligation to mention if the service user is engaged in illegal activities or activities that might lead to consequences from certain institutions. This may not always be the case, however due to a fear of the possibility and the assumption that this will happen most of the time, service users tend to avoid mentioning everything that is going on in their lives that is relevant to the support interventions, resulting in an incomplete understanding from the social worker which decreases the possibility effectively providing support interventions.

"They have the feeling they cannot be honest toward a municipality official or a social worker. They think they have an obligation to notify legal authorities, and mentioning certain aspects will only bring them more trouble."

Theme II C: Perceived rushed and impersonal approach to formal support interventions

Due to the reason social work professionals typically attained higher forms of education, they often have a more methodological and structured approach to conducting support interventions. This structured and systematic approach of conducting support interventions sometimes results in service users perceiving the support interventions to be impersonal and rushed, as social work professionals are pressured to meet quotas and adhere to prescribed procedures. This emphasis on documentation and systematic approach can discourage service users from receiving help from social work professionals.

"Under the guidance of a social worker… service users are constantly pushed. Because social workers have to deliver files and documentations throughout support interventions. This can totally crush service users' motivation to receive help"

Theme II D: Unavailability

Theme II D 1: Being Forwarded by Social Service Institutions or Government Agencies. Lastly, people in need of support interventions experience barriers to the accessibility and availability of social care services due to logistical problems within and between these institutions. For instance, when an individual who is living with debt searches for help, they may contact the municipality and explain their situation. Once the municipality has heard their story and processed their information, they may be sent to another institution within the city. This can for instance be an institution which analyzes their financial situation.

Once this new institution has evaluated their situation, they may for example conclude that they are not the right institution to deliver help to this individual, and they send them to a social district team. In turn, the social district team will tell them that they are not able to help them in this particular situation because there are other issues that they are not authorized to resolve. This results in the individuals in need not knowing where to obtain proper support.

"If you go to the municipality with financial problems, they will send you to the pin counter for instance. The pin counter will tell you they are very compassionate and ask you what your specific problems are. Thereafter they will tell you they are not able to help you with your specific problems and send you to a social district team. So when people search for help and these are the answers they get, they drop out very quickly"

Due to institutions being unclear about which issues they can help service users with and forwarding people who reach out to them to other institutions, individuals experience trouble acquiring appropriate support. This leads to people searching for support services from these institutions to experience a lack of clarity in where they have to be to obtain support.

"I think people not knowing where they have to be is one of the biggest problems people experience when searching for help."

Theme II D 2: Excessive Caseloads. This difficulty in obtaining support from an institution is partially fostered by the excessive caseloads managed by officials or professionals within these institutions. Often, a lack of desire to help service users is not the issue; rather, the problem lies in the limited time available to assess and resolve each individual case. Consequently, potential service users are frequently referred to other institutions, necessitating them to repeatedly explain their situation each time they ask for support. This repetitive process erodes their hope of receiving adequate support and discourages them from seeking further support.

"Some officials have up to 80 cases at a time. They cannot make time for every resident of course. Even if they wanted to, they wouldn't have the time. That's why they forward them so often. And then they have to tell their story again, and again, and again. For some people, that's when they lose all hope."

Theme III: Empathy

As discussed in the paragraph above, EbE possess a unique ability which enables them to connect to people who are experiencing the situation they were once in. By having shared experiences in a specific situation, the expert by experience and the service user create an empathetic bond through recognition and understanding. In the context of this study, the expert by experience and service user both have experience living in material deprivation and having problematic debts. As a result of this empathy through recognition and understanding, EbE can support service users more effectively.

Within this theme, three sub themes have been identified. Firstly, the mutual ways EbE and service users understand each other and recognize each other's feelings and situations will be highlighted. Secondly, it will be shown how EbE allow service users to open up more by taking away feelings of shame and the taboo around material deprivation and debt. Thirdly, the ability of EbE to detect underlying issues service users initially avoid talkin about will be discussed.

Theme III A: Reciprocal understanding

Theme III A 1: Understanding of the Service User from the Expert by Experience.
EbE and service users connect to each other reciprocally. The expert by experience has a deeper understanding of the service user's situation. Consequently, they can consider the client's experiences and the associated difficulties or challenges. This accounts for a service delivery by EbE that is tailored to the service user's requirements, offering deep insights into the appropriate approach for each situation.

"I think understanding is a very important factor. You know the situation they're in and how it feels, so to say, so we can take that into account."

Theme III A 2: Understanding of the Expert by Experience from the Service User.
The reason service users connect to EbE is fostered by a feeling of recognition due to the shared experience they have with the expert by experience who is helping them. Knowing someone has lived through similar experiences you are currently experiencing creates an environment in which you relate to the other. This allows the service user to open up more about the problems they are facing and discuss their situation as it is, due to a "click" felt by the service user.

''They know, 'whatever I'm feeling, he's felt. Whatever I'm going through, he's gone through. I don't have to sugarcoat it.'. They don't have to tell me any stories about what their situation is doing with them. I know."

Theme III B: Taboo
According to the participants of this research, there is a persistent taboo on poverty and receiving help for it. Due to this taboo, people living in material deprivation and/or debt feel shame about their situation and have a fear of being judged. This discourages many people from seeking help for the situation they are living in. EbE can make service users more at ease by telling them they are not alone and that they will not be judged.

"What I see is that experts by experience can make the people who come seeking help more at ease. By showing them they are not alone, and that they won't be judged."

Creating a setting in which the service user does not feel judged creates a more accessible way through which people living in material deprivation can find support.

"What I see is that EbE can make the people who come seeking help more at ease. By showing them they are not alone, and that they won't be judged.""You can tell them that they don't need to be ashamed, and even offer a shoulder to cry on in some cases. And all this without the client feeling any shame. Because it's still debt counseling. Debts, poverty, there's still a taboo surrounding that."

Theme III C: The Ability to Detect Underlying Issues

Another skill that EbE possess is the ability to identify deeper underlying issues in clients. A client may initially present a problem without disclosing the full context. By asking probing questions and carefully observing the client's behavior, EbE can uncover the complete narrative, including the aspects that remain concealed.

"I'm very good at recognizing when someone is saying something different than what they mean. I immediately see they're just showing socially desirable behavior, and that's when I ask further questions."

This ability to discern discrepancies between a client's words and their underlying feelings or intentions is a very effective skill to improve the support process. EbE, having navigated similar struggles themselves, are particularly capable of noticing nuances within communication that may indicate deeper issues. Their empathetic and insightful approach enables them to gently see beyond surface-level responses, fostering a more open and honest dialogue. This not only helps in building trust but also allows for a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of the client's situation, leading to more effective support and intervention strategies.

Theme IV: Drivers and barriers for support interventions of experts by experience

As illustrated in the previous themes, EbE have the ability to connect to service users by providing accessible support to those in need and could possibly act as a bridge between individuals living in material deprivation and social service organizations. However, there are a few notable drivers and barriers that influence their ability to help others and the success of their support interventions. Within this theme, three important factors that influence the ability of EbE to provide successful interventions have been identified. These include; education about social work practices, recognition by social workers and social service institutions, and having overcome personal problems

Theme IV A: Education about Social Work

Theme IV A 1: Enhanced Abilities through Higher Levels of Education. Another factor that increases the skill and ability of EbE and ultimately accounts for more successful support, is the degree to which they have received education regarding social work practices after gaining real-life experience with material deprivation and debt. As most initiatives, networks or institutions through which EbE can conduct their activities do not have requirements regarding education, a large portion of EbE has not followed education about the methods used within social work.

However, multiple interviewees have indicated that most of those who work as EbE and have received higher education about being an expert by experience after acquiring lived experience are more successful at their job than those who have not followed this education, or only followed this education at a lower level. This is because they have theoretical knowledge about social work methodics and conversation techniques next to their practical knowledge through lived experiences, allowing them to have more insights into how to help service users successfully. However, most of the individuals who enroll in such educational courses eventually drop out.

"If I look at those who have studied expert by experience at a higher level of education, I can see that they are better at doing their job. This is because they have learned about social work methodics. But most of the people who start this education, quit at some point."

Theme IV A 2: Seeing support interventions ''from the other side''. One of the reasons it is particularly useful for an expert by experience to follow education about social work practices is because they gain deeper insights about the social care methodics that have been applied to themselves in the past. By seeing the support interventions from the other side, extra knowledge about how to apply it to those who are currently using such services is gained.

"I think experts by experience would profit greatly by following education about their occupation. Why, you ask? Because then you see the methodics that have been used on you from the other side."

Theme IV B: Barriers through lack of recognition in formal care

Theme IV B 1: Lack of Recognition. A major barrier indicated by the EbE interviewed in this research was the lack of recognition in social work settings they experience when working with professionals, and the fact that they occasionally do not feel taken seriously because of this. An example of perceived hierarchy between social workers and EbE, EbE may encounter occasional challenges in voicing their perspectives when they have relevant contributions to make.

"Sometimes I see a possible solution to a problem we encounter with the team, but I won't say it, because I don't feel like it. But you just notice that they are more important than you. That makes me think 'what am I even doing here?', because I am not allowed to say very much."

Theme IV B 2: Hierarchical Divide. According to the interviewed participants, the hierarchical divide between social workers and EbE leads to power imbalance, communication gaps, and a lack of inclusion. This hierarchical structure should be abandoned. Although EbE offer different input than professionals, their contributions should not be seen as unimportant. Working together as colleagues instead of having a strong hierarchy and valuing each other's activities and input were named as ways to foster more recognition.

"Social workers should not stand higher than us… we should be more like colleagues. And that you both value each other in it. For who you are and what you are doing. And that you both have a contribution to make."

Theme IV C: Having overcome personal problems

An important factor for an individual with lived experience with debt and material deprivation is having worked past your own struggles. With this, not only the financial issues an individual has faced are meant, but also the emotional and psychological hardships that came with it. During the provision of social service interventions to those in need of it, an expert by experience will encounter many situations that might act as triggers for negative memories or emotions that have been experienced when living in poverty themselves. In some cases, this might lead an expert by experience to fall back into an old mindset or show avoidant behavior for some service users or situations, which is detrimental to the support interventions provided to the service users. As an expert by experience providing support services, it is important to be able to withstand triggers from negative recollections or dissociate from them in order to provide successful support interventions without relapsing into a negative previous mentality.

"It's a beautiful thing if you want to help others through your experiences. But it cannot be done just like that."

"Not everyone can become an expert by experience, because you will encounter a lot of triggers. When that happens, it's very important to stay strong, take the other by the hand and look for a solution together. Without falling back into your old struggles."

Discussion

Summary of Findings, Relation to Literature, and Interpretation of Results

Unique Ability to Connect

As has been illustrated in the thematic analysis, EbE have a unique ability to connect to those who are living in material deprivation. Individuals who have problematic debt fear speaking out about their situation under the assumption that they will be judged because of a persistent taboo on poverty and debt. EbE can take away many barriers for those in need of social services due to their enhanced possibility of making a connection with service users through recognition in one another through shared experiences, making the support provided by EbE more accessible. These shared experiences also give EbE deeper insights into the

situations and feelings of service users, improving their ability to help them with the issues they are facing.

The accessibility EbE possess relates to the existing literature about EbE. Van den Boom (2018) highlighted the increased accessibility of EbE and drew upon a higher level of understanding and acknowledgement from EbE. Barker and Maguire (2017) explained that shared experiences of EbE and service users had led to the ability to form a genuine empathetic connection, build relationships, and establish mutual trust. This mutual trust between EbE and service users has also been found in the thematic analysis.

Problems with Social Service Organizations

At the same time, service users perceive multiple barriers regarding the accessibility of formal social service systems. The professionalization in the use of language of social workers accounts for barriers in communication through which service users have trouble in understanding the message social workers attempt to convey. Moreover, this professional communication and behavior creates distrust in many people who are in need of support for debt due to the fact that it does not properly match that of most service users. The emphasis on measurable outcomes and implementation account for service interventions that are perceived to be rushed and impersonal. Adding onto this, service users are met with long waiting lists and a forwarding culture when looking for help from formal social service institutions, further discouraging them from following through with them.

A few of the barriers to accessibility of former social service providers as seen in the thematic analysis are also seen in the literature analysis. The emphasis on structuralization and importance of measurable outcomes leading to a dehumanized approach undermining trust between social workers and service users as described by Butler & Drakeford (2005) can be linked to the perceived rush and impersonal approach described in the thematic analysis, which discourages service users from engaging in support interventions. The barrier to accessibility of organizations due to the lack of clarity on where to obtain support experienced by individuals shown by the thematic analysis is also seen in the paper by Singh (2021), where she explains how lack of transparency in organizations resulting in individuals not knowing where to be for their specific situation leads to people refraining from accessing services.

The barriers caused by health illiteracy and a decrease in trust as a result of professional behavior and language, which have been identified in the thematic analysis, have not been identified in the literature review. This may be due to the fact that the thematic analysis was written from interviews that were solely about the context of support services for material

deprivation, poverty, and debt, while most of the existing literature was written about social work organizations in general.

Experts by Experience as a Bridge between Service Users and Service Providers, and Drivers and Barriers for Experts by Experience

The thematic analysis has shown that EbE recognize the limitations they have in providing support services. The limitations some EbE have are caused by a lack of theoretical knowledge about methods used for conducting support interventions, or the lack of a professional title needed to carry out specific steps in support interventions, such as registering a service user at the credit bank. Both of these limitations can be linked to a lack of education experts have had compared to social workers. Klee et al. (2019) mentioned proper training to be a significant factor for EbE to conduct successful support interventions. Receiving education about social work methods has also been named as a factor that greatly increases the abilities EbE have for providing successful support interventions in the thematic analysis.

As seen in the thematic analysis, EbE recognize that social work professionals are important and necessary actors within the social service system. EbE can provide support to social work organizations by doing preparational work and connecting service users to social work institutions. However, collaboration between EbE and social work professionals is hindered by a hierarchical structure and a lack of recognition for EbE.

Klee et al. (2019) describes supportive organizational structure to be a factor for successful integration of EbE, and supportive leadership to be a determinant of success of implementation of EbE in organizations. Discrimination and prejudice from non-peer colleagues were main barriers to the integration of EbE. This has also been seen in the thematic analysis, where a lack of recognition and power balance were deemed as barriers to collaboration between EbE and social workers.

Limitations

The sample size of this study included only five participants. This may limit the generalizability of the findings, as a smaller sample size might not capture a full range of experiences and insights. Moreover, since participants were recruited through two locations of the same organization, and only included EbE that perform activities in the context of poverty and problematic debt, findings may not be representative of all contexts or regions.

The study relies on qualitative data, which, while rich in detail, can be subjective and harder to generalize compared to quantitative data. While semi-structured interviews allow for in-depth exploration, they may also introduce interviewer bias. The consistency of data can be affected by how questions are phrased and how interviews are conducted. Interviews were conducted in Dutch. If the analysis or reporting is done in another language, nuances and meanings could be lost in translation. Additionally, the thematic analysis involves subjective interpretation, which might introduce bias. Although efforts are made to ensure consistency, personal bias can influence the identification and interpretation of themes.

Policy Implications

Identification of the Problem

The fact that the very support services that are the most needed and important to improve the financial and living situations of those experiencing debt, are also the least available, accessible, and trusted services, indicates that there is a problem with the system that provides support for people living in situations of material deprivation and debt, ranging from social work service providers to governmental institutions. According to the participants that have been interviewed in this research, service users prefer receiving support from EbE over social workers. Individuals who are in need of support for their financial situation deem non-professional caregivers more accessible than professionals with years of education and experience. For this reason, it needs to be assessed how the social service systems for those living with debt can be transformed into a support framework that is more effective, efficient, and accessible to service users. From the findings of this research, three possible solutions to this problem are implied. These will be presented in the following subsections.

Transformation of Organizations within the Social Service System

Firstly, the formal service system would need to be transformed. Service users experience great barriers to the accessibility of social service institutions. Part of this is fostered by professionalization of the practices and way of speaking of social service professionals and officials. This discouragement of engagement is further strengthened by a perceived difference in social status between service users and social work professionals implied by a professional

way of speaking. To encourage social service users to engage in support services, an understandable way of speaking needs to be held. This would simultaneously mitigate the barrier instated by health literacy in support users.

However, transforming the entire social service system is an extraordinarily complex and challenging task as this system is entrenched in deep bureaucratic structures and professional norms that have been developed over decades. Large institutions, such as those involved in social services, tend to resist change. This is a result of established protocols, long-standing practices, and a workforce accustomed to specific ways of operating (Rehman et al., 2021). Changing these entrenched systems requires significant effort and often meets with resistance from those who are accustomed to the status quo (Jost, 2015).

Regulation on Who can Become an Expert by Experience

Secondly, there would need to be more regulation and standards on who can become an expert by experience. Within the current framework, most EbE play a minor role in the support interventions that are being conducted. The reasons for this are their limited knowledge about social work methods and powers within the framework of institutions. As has been pointed out in the thematic analysis, EbE who have followed education on social work practices or on how to be an expert by experience are better at doing their work and can provide more effective care to service users. Installing a requirement of education could possibly resolve the barriers of limited powers and knowledge EbE are facing to provide effective support. Installing a requirement to have followed some sort of education or diploma about experience work in order to become an expert by experience would introduce a new, recognized, force into the social service system. This force would provide accessible support to service users who are experiencing barriers to the current formal support system.

However, installing some requirement to become an expert by experience would come with some limitations. First and foremost, requiring individuals to follow education about systematic methods within social care would decrease the informal nature of EbE, as seen in the thematic analysis. There is a chance that a large portion of the new EbE will have similar professionalized traits currently seen as barriers in social work professionals. Another complicating factor of installing an education requirement is the fact that most EbE following higher or middle education about being an expert by experience eventually drop out of the programme.

Increasing the Engagement and Recognition of Experts by Experience

Lastly, an increased engagement of EbE in social work practices could pose a possible solution to a part of the limited accessibility of the formal social service system. EbE have the ability to build relationships and facilitate trust with service users. This relationship and trust is often missing with and towards social work professionals. However, EbE recognize the limitations they have and the importance of the role of social workers in conducting full and proper support interventions for those in need. EbE can serve as actors that establish contact with service users and make them at ease, while social workers possess the ability to work on solutions and actually resolve their problems. For this reason, it is important for EbE to work together with social work professionals to provide services that facilitate trust and accessibility, but also have the systematic power to reach solutions.

The only barrier to cooperation between EbE and social workers is the limited recognition of EbE. In the literature review of this paper it was pointed out that EbE have the highest level of successful integration when they have leadership endorsement, their organization has a supportive organization structure, and when roles are clearly defined. The interviews highlighted the need of diminishing the hierarchical divide between social workers and EbE to foster effective collaboration. With better collaboration between EbE and social service organizations, which can be realized through mitigation of the barriers pointed out in the thematic analysis, EbE could contribute to a more accessible and effective social service system by taking on tasks social workers do not provide accessible support for.

Implications for Future Research

To gain further insights, further research could be conducted by improving the limitations this research had. This includes a larger sample size and inclusion of EbE from multiple regions and organizations. Moreover, multiple researchers could work together in order to minimize interviewer bias and personal bias when conducting the thematic analysis.

Future research could expand on the importance of education for the success of support interventions by EbE, how higher education could be incentivized, and what the drivers and barriers are for EbE to pursue education about social work practices. It could also research the pros and cons of following education or training about social work by EbE and how that would change the abilities and position of EbE within social service systems.

Future research could also expand on how exactly the collaboration between EbE and social workers/social service institutions can be improved to foster accessible and complete support interventions for people living with problematic debt and in material deprivation or poverty. This can be done by researching which factors might lead to good collaboration, or on how certain tasks should be divided between or worked on together by EbE and social workers.

Both the paraclinical role described by Gillard (2019) and the mixed approach of both structured sessions with professionals and unstructured sessions with peer workers found most effective by Mccarthy et al. (2019) have not come up in the interviews. Further research of these ideas would lead to a better understanding of the role of EbE and how they can be effectively implemented to improve social support practices, as this does align with the possible bridge EbE can pose as between social service organizations and service users.

Lastly, practical implications of the inclusion of experts by experience in social work institutions could also be researched. This would include questions like ''which tasks can experts by experience tackle to improve social support interventions of social support organizations?'' ''what are the roles of experts by experience in social service institutions?'' or ''how can experts by experience add value to a specific support intervention?''.

Conclusion

This research has sought answers to the question *"How can experts by experience contribute to an accessible and effective social support system?"*. It has done so by assessing what EbE are and why they are increasing in popularity through reviewing literature. This is for example through the alleged unique insights they provide in the situations of service users. Thereafter it presented the barriers to social support organizations experienced by (potential) service users. These included a lack of transparency and an emphasis on measurable outcomes and methodological service practices.

In the thematic analysis, a comparison of EbE and social workers was drawn, which highlights differences in education, approach, and abilities. The barriers to accessibility service users experience in social service organizations included health literacy, a lack of trust, and unavailability. After that, the ability to make connections to service users through empathy and recognition has been highlighted. Lastly, the barriers and drivers for successful support interventions of EbE have been shown. These included the importance of social work education,

and recognition and acceptance from colleagues in social support organizations. Next to that, having processed personal issues from the past has been mentioned as a barrier for some EbE.

The results show the barriers to access of social support systems experienced by individuals in need of social support services and the abilities EbE have, which could pose possible solutions to these barriers. These include a greater ability to make a connection with service users which provides accessibility, and making service users at ease by creating a non-judgmental environment which fosters openness. This provides a solution to the barriers service users experience to formal social support services through distrust of and difficulty making a connection with social workers. Moreover, EbE can reduce workloads within the social service system by conducting preparational work.

The barriers to the implementation of EbE and the success of their support interventions are also shown. For example, EbE experience barriers to collaboration with social service organizations due to a lack of recognition by social service organizations. But EbE also experience barriers through a lack of education or not having processed personal issues from their past.

Three policy implications have arised from this. Firstly, the social support system could undergo change to provide more accessibility to service users. However, this is not a feasible solution as these systems are built on years of policymaking and experience. Another solution would be education requirements for EbE. This is more feasible, however, currently most EbE following such education drop out at some point. Next to that, it could possibly impact the accessibility EbE currently have to offer if the use of for example professional language is incorporated by many EbE who follow this education. The last policy implication is more implementation of EbE in social support organizations, which could possibly improve the social support system. This policy implication seems most feasible, as mitigation of the barriers experienced by EbE could facilitate higher collaboration between EbE and the social service system.

It is important to conduct further research on what the impact of better education for experts by experience would be, how they can add value to social service organizations, in which ways experts by experience can be implemented in social service organizations, and how collaboration between experts by experience and social service organizations can be fostered and enhanced. Experts by experience can possibly add great value to social support systems and pose solutions to current problems faced by them. However, in order to do this, their exact abilities must be assessed, their potential roles must be understood better, and it must be researched how they can be successfully integrated into social service organizations.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: interview guide

Interview guide

Introductievragen
- Hoe gaat het met u

- Zou u uzelf kunnen introduceren en kort iets vertellen over uw achtergrond

- Hoe zou u persoonlijk ervaringsdeskundige/ervaringswerker definieren?

- Zou u uzelf een ervaringsdeskundige/ervaringswerker noemen?

- Wat zijn uw ervaringen als ervaringsdeskundige/ervaringswerker?

- Wat zijn uw activiteiten als ervaringsdeskundige/ervaringswerker? Weet u van activiteiten van andere ervaringswerkers/ervaringsdeskundigen?

- Heeft u, direct of indirect, armoede ervaren? Kunt u voorbeelden geven? (wat is armoede, wellicht: context leeuwarden)

Hoofdvragen
- Wat maakt volgens u de ondersteuning van ervaringswerkers/ervaringsdeskundigen effectief voor mensen die in armoede leven?

- Welke problemen waar mensen die in armoede mee leven, kunnen zij specifiek geholpen mee worden door ervaringsdeskundigen?

- Zijn er barrières of moeilijkheden voor mensen die in armoede leven tijdens het proberen te krijgen van formele ondersteuningsdiensten of hulp? (could be a prompt for previous question if they tell difficulties they faced themselves when trying to acquire formal support systems)

- Wat zijn veelvoorkomende problemen die u tegenkomt tijdens het ondersteunen van mensen die in armoede leven? (could be linked to previous question)

- ervaringsdeskundigen/ervaringswerkers worden vaak gezien als alternatief voor- of brug naar formele ondersteuningssystemen. Wat denkt u daarvan?

- Wat is het verschil tussen ervaringsdeskundigen en sociaal werkers, en hoe ondersteunen zij mensen die in armoede leven?(if interviewee received help from both social workers and experts by experience, this could be a prompt for q10)

- Zijn er verantwoordelijkheden die sociaal werkers hebben die overgenomen kunnen worden door ervaringsdeskundigen of vice versa? (potentially: which responsibilities can

they help each other in?) (if interviewee received help from both social workers and experts by experience, this could be a prompt for q10)

- Kunt u een paar voorbeelden noemen van toen uw persoonlijke ervaring invloed hebben gehad op de ondersteuning die u heeft geleverd? (as an expert by experience to people living in material deprivation)?

Slotvragen
- Wat zou u zeggen dat de belangrijkste factoren zijn die bijdragen aan het succes van ondersteuning interventies van ervaringsdeskundigen (aan mensen die in armoede leven)

- We naderen het eind van het interview. Zijn er nog vragen die u heeft richting mij? Zou u de resultaten van het onderzoek willen hebben zodra deze klaar zijn?