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Online hearing voices peer support groups

Submission date
24/01/2023

Recruitment status
No longer recruiting

Registration date
06/03/2023

Overall study status
Completed

Last Edited
06/03/2025

Condition category
Signs and Symptoms

[X] Prospectively registered
[X] Protocol
[X] Statistical analysis plan
[X] Results
[_] Individual participant data

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims
Hearing voices that nobody else can hear (auditory hallucinations) can be a distressing and isolating experience. Previous research has shown that meeting others with similar experiences can help people feel less isolated, cope better with their voice hearing experiences, and experience more hope for the future. While there are many peer support groups for voice hearers that meet face-to-face, many people cannot access these groups. The purpose of this study is to see if it is possible to run a peer support group for voice hearers online and if so, to start to explore how and why these groups may be beneficial. It is the hope that if these groups prove to be effective, they can be rolled out on a more wide-spread basis within the NHS.

Who can participate?
Six to ten adults who live in the UK and currently hear voices will be recruited to take part in the online hearing voices group. In order to participate, participants will need to have consistent access to the internet and the ability to use videoconferencing platforms (e.g. Zoom, MS Teams).

What does the study involve?
Participants will be recruited from secondary NHS mental health services, third-party mental health organisations, and the wider community. All study procedures will be completed online. Participants will be asked to join interviews and group meetings from a private, quiet location that is convenient to them. Participants will take part in a 1-to-1 interview and complete questionnaires about their voice hearing experiences before the online peer support group starts. The group will be facilitated by a peer facilitator with lived experience of voice hearing and a clinical psychologist from the NHS. The group will then meet once a week for 90 minutes for 6 months. In the group, participants can talk about their voices, explore how their voices make them feel, what their voices may be connected to, and learn new ways of understanding and coping with voices. At weeks 4 and 12, participants will be asked to complete a survey about their experiences in the group so far. At the end of the 6 months, participants will complete another interview, asking about their experiences within the group, and complete the same questionnaires.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?
It is hoped that participants will find partaking in the online peer support group beneficial,

however this cannot be guaranteed. Data collected from research participants will be used to refine this intervention and hopefully enable it to become more widespread for other voice hearers in the future.

Given the sensitive nature of the research topic, it is possible that participants may become distressed during research interviews or during the online peer support group. In such an instance, participants will be reassured that they do not need to talk about anything more than they are comfortable with. Participants will also have the opportunity to talk to either the peer facilitator or clinical psychologist 1-on-1 should they become distressed during the group.

Disagreement is common and expected part of groups and it is possible that disagreement between group members may arise. Conflict will be addressed as openly and transparently as possible within the group.

Where is the study run from?
University of Manchester (UK)

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?
July 2022 to July 2024

Who is funding the study?
University of Manchester (UK)

Who is the main contact?
Alison Branitsky, alison.branitsky@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

Contact information

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Public

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Additional identifiers

Integrated Research Application System (IRAS)
321293

Protocol serial number
NHS002041

Study information

Scientific Title
Online hearing voices peer support groups: a feasibility and acceptability study

Study objectives
An online hearing voices peer support group for adults who hear voices will be feasible and acceptable

Ethics approval required
Old ethics approval format

Ethics approval(s)
Approved 21/03/2023, West Midlands – Black Country Research Ethics Committee (Meeting held by video-conference via Zoom; +44 (0)207 104 8010, (0)207 104 8141; blackcountry.rec@hra.nhs.uk), ref: 23/WM/0045

Primary study design
Interventional

Study design
Online non-randomized interventional trial

Study type(s)
Treatment

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied
Hearing voices (auditory verbal hallucinations)

Interventions
All participants enrolled in this study will participate in an online peer support group for voice hearers. The intervention is built on the principles of the Hearing Voices Network, which positions voice hearing as a meaningful and understandable psychological experience which is worth exploring. While peer support groups exist for voice hearers in the community, to date, no study has looked at the feasibility of running these types of groups online via videoconference. The peer support group will run for 6 months (26 sessions) and will meet weekly for 90 minutes over a videoconferencing platform (e.g., Zoom, MS Teams). The group will be facilitated by a peer facilitator with lived experience in voice hearing and a clinical psychologist. Group meeting details will be issued to all participants before the first group, and will remain the same for the entirety of the study. In the tradition of the Hearing Voices Network, the groups will remain largely unstructured, with participants encouraged to share whatever feels most relevant and important to them. However, within the group, there will be particular emphasis on exploring the phenomenology of voices, potential origins and understandings of voices, and developing new ways of coping with and relating to voices. Feasibility parameters (e.g., attendance) will be collected during each group meeting.

Intervention Type
Behavioural

Primary outcome(s)
As this is a feasibility trial, a single primary outcome measure is not meaningful. However, key feasibility outcomes will be collected which will inform a definitive trial:
1. Referral and recruitment rates measured using study records at the end of the recruitment period in June 2023
2. Group attendance and outcome measure completeness rates measured using study records at the end of the study period in December 2023
3. Acceptability of the intervention assessed via drop-out rates and reason for withdrawal measured using study records at the end of the study period in 2023

Key secondary outcome(s)
1. Acceptability of the intervention and potential mechanisms of efficacy measured using qualitative interviews at baseline and end-of-study
2. Evaluations of social comparison measured using the Social Comparison Scale at baseline and end-of-treatment
3. Feelings of social connectedness and support measured using the Social Connectedness Scale-Revised (SCS-R) at baseline and end-of-study
4. Loneliness and social isolation measured using the UCLA Loneliness Scale at baseline and end-of-study
5. Personal beliefs about the self as a voice hearer measured using the Personal Beliefs about Experiences Questionnaire (PBEQ) at baseline and end-of-study
6. Assertive relating to voices and other people measured using the Approve-Voices and Approve-Social Questionnaires at baseline and end-of-study
7. The emotional impact of voice hearing measured using the Voice Impact Scale (VIS) at baseline and end-of-study
8. Acceptance of voices measured using the Voice Acceptance or Action Scale (VAAS-12) at baseline and end-of-study
9. Sense of personal recovery measured using the Questionnaire about the Process of Recovery-15 (QPR-15) at baseline and end-of-study
10. Feelings of cohesiveness within the group measured using the Group Cohesiveness Scale (GCS) at 4-weeks, 12-weeks, and end-of-study
11. Therapeutic factors within the group measured using the Therapeutic Factors Inventory-Short Form (TFI-S) at 4-weeks, 12-weeks and end-of-study

Completion date
28/07/2024

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria
1. Aged 18 years and over
2. Currently residing in the UK
3. Heard voices for at least 6 months
4. Able to provide informed consent
5. Willingness to engage in group support
6. Consistent access to the internet and ability to use videoconferencing platforms

Participant type(s)
Patient

Healthy volunteers allowed
No

Age group
Adult

Lower age limit
18 Years

Sex

All

Total final enrolment
9

Key exclusion criteria
1. At immediate risk of harm to self or others
2. Non-English speaking as assessment measures are only validated in English and in order for the support group to function, participants need to be able to communicate with one another

Date of first enrolment
04/04/2023

Date of final enrolment
05/10/2023

Locations

Countries of recruitment
United Kingdom

England

Study participating centre
Greater Manchester Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust
Prestwich Hospital
Bury New Road
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Sponsor information

Organisation
University of Manchester

ROR
https://ror.org/027m9bs27

Funder(s)

Funder type

University/education

Funder Name
University of Manchester

Alternative Name(s)
University of Manchester in United Kingdom, University of Manchester UK, The University of Manchester, UoM

Funding Body Type
Government organisation

Funding Body Subtype
Universities (academic only)

Location
United Kingdom

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan
The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study will be available upon request from Alison Branitsky (alison.branitsky@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk).

IPD sharing plan summary
Available on request

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Results article		04/02/2025	06/03/2025	Yes	No
HRA research summary			20/09/2023	No	No
Participant information sheet	version 1.0	11/01/2023	31/01/2023	No	Yes
Protocol file	version 1.0	11/01/2023	31/01/2023	No	No
Protocol file	version 2.0	17/01/2024	26/02/2024	No	No
Statistical Analysis Plan	version 1	29/03/2023	29/03/2023	No	No