

Exploring the experiences of working aged male carers in East Sussex supporting someone over 18yrs with severe mental illness (SMI); To gain a better understanding of identity, masculinity and help seeking behaviours

6.3M	13,515	1 in 3
Unpaid carers in the UK ₁	Estimated male carers in East Sussex ₂	East Sussex carers are men ₂

Why it Matters

Historically, male carers have been, and remain an underrepresented community in unpaid care research,³

Working aged male carers often do not identify as carers, and many perceive raising concerns about their own health and wellbeing as a sign of weakness or vulnerability,⁴

It is believed that Men's help-seeking behaviours differ from women's, highlighting the potential need for services to provide gender-responsive support and address the access to talking therapies,⁵

Methods

A qualitative methodological approach; 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted and analysed using Braun and Clarke's Reflexive Thematic Analysis. Participants were purposively recruited from a sample of 111 male carers within a wider register of 556 carers supporting someone with SMI in East Sussex

The Voices of the Male Carers

- “No, I still struggle to identify as that (a carer), because I feel guilty labelling him (dad) as someone that needs care”
- “I just thought. I'm too busy (to be a carer). I've just gotta get on with my life...deal with the next thing to carry on...Put it to the back of your mind and carry on”
- “I think there's a certain amount of maybe pride or ego that's kind of built into the male species...Never likes to admit that things are wrong,
- “It's probably more the perception as a man...that to some extent is ingrained in you where you go no, you're not really meant to ask for help. You're just meant to kind of muddle through until it all blows up in your face”
- “I did two years of counselling...two years and that was what it needed...They were great because it was me being able to talk about me. I don't talk about me”
- “I've been going to bi-weekly therapy...In the past If I was upset about something I would choose not to speak out about it because I wouldn't be heard... It's been a massive turning point for us and our relationship as well.”

The Findings

The men reject the label "carer", reflecting tensions between masculine identity and supporting someone with severe mental ill health

Traditional masculine norms continue to influence men's help-seeking and engagement with support, including peer support

Despite this, and unexpectedly many men are willing to access one-to-one professional talking therapies

Recommendations for Practice

To actively address communication strategies to reframe the language surrounding the term "carer" which better reflects male carers perceived identities and preferences

Promote more inclusive, male-sensitive support with greater access to tailored one-to-one talking therapies

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