The Participatory Action Research Initiative: Engaging the voice of individuals with lived mental health experience to better meet the needs of the communities we serve

Kathleen Biebel, PhD & Amanda Costa, BS

SPARC — Systems and Psychological Advances Research Center

Participatory Action Research — **PAR**

What is Participatory Action Research ?

PAR is a collaborative approach that equally involves all partners in the research process and recognizes the unique strengths that each brings

What is the goal of PAR?

PAR identifies a research topic that's important to the community, and aims to generate knowledge to create action for social change.

How does PAR work?

PAR increases participants' voice and power in the research context, and emphasizes equitable partnerships between researchers and participants. PAR emphasizes meaningful engagement of participants throughout the research process, and addresses questions and concerns most relevant to stakeholders.

How is PAR different from traditional research?

PAR disrupts conventional hierarchies of knowledge production by reframing:

- Who decides what research questions to ask
- How to ask the questions
- How to interpret findings
- How to use resulting information to make change happen

The Participatory Action Research Initiative

In 2016, the UMMS Systems and Psychosocial Advances Research Center (SPARC) launched the *PAR Initiative*, to support faculty and staff to *more actively and systematically engage the voice of individuals with lived experience of serious mental health conditions in research, knowledge translation, and dissemination activities*. The PAR Initiative aims to:

- Increase SPARC'S faculty/staff knowledge of PAR and fidelity to PAR processes
- Increase SPARC's organizational capacity, resources, and supports to conduct PAR
- Broaden and strengthen local/statewide collaborations specific to PAR
- Increase national and international recognition of our PAR efforts

Our Vision

To lead the mental health research community to work in partnership with individuals with lived mental health experience.

A 2016 survey of SPARC current PAR efforts asked:

- Have you conducted research, knowledge translation and dissemination activities using PAR?

  - 84% yes
  - 8% no
  - 8% not sure
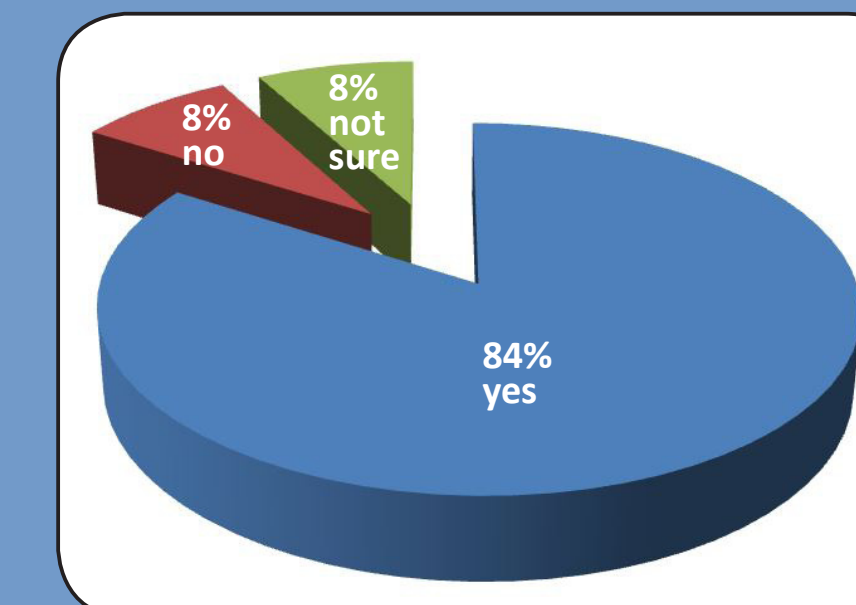
- What research, knowledge translation and dissemination activities have you conducted using PAR?

  Research Activities:

  - 100% - developed study materials
  - 82% - developed research questions
  - 64% - applied for project funding
  - 64% - designed study methodologies
  - 64% - conducted data collection
  - 64% - analyzed data
  - 55% - recruited study participants

  Knowledge Translation (KT) & Dissemination Activities:

  - 82% - co-presented at conferences
  - 55% - developed KT/dissemination products
  - 45% - published papers/journal articles
  - 45% - other dissemination activities (e.g., social media)

- Have you experienced barriers or challenges to doing PAR?

  - 64% yes
  - 27% no
  - 9% not used PAR
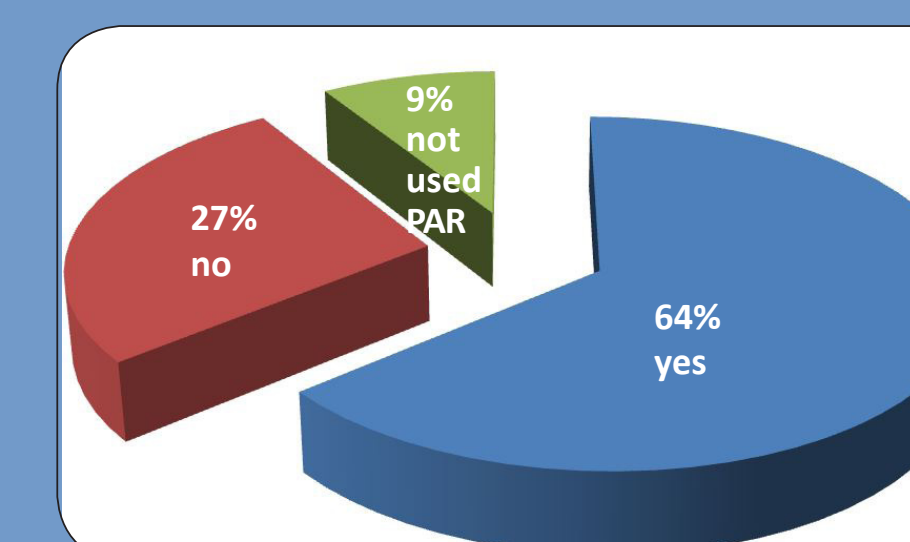
- What tools and resources would be helpful to conduct PAR?

  - 82% - ongoing consultation with experienced PAR researchers
  - 73% - funding to support PAR (e.g., paying individuals with lived experience to consult on projects)
  - 55% - ways to track fidelity to PAR
  - 55% - quarterly check ins with SPARC's PAR Initiative leaders
  - 45% - access to a PAR advisory council
  - 45% - written tools and materials on how to conduct PAR
  - 45% - live presentation on conducting PAR

Long Term Goal

To share resources and knowledge gained through the PAR Initiative to enhance the ability of researchers to work side by side with relevant stakeholders to develop robust research that addresses the needs and concerns of the communities we serve.