**Applying behavioural and implementation science to improve group behaviour change programmes**

Theme: Population Health
Reference: MRC19PHBa Gillison

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Group-based sessions that support people to change lifestyle behaviours to promote health and prevent disease are increasingly used in health services. However, information about the behavioural and social science behind group processes and dynamics has not been systematically applied to ensure that such interventions are evidence-based. Facilitators often identify 'good' and 'bad' groups, in terms of attendance, dynamics, tone and outcomes, but to this point have little means of understanding how and why these differences occur and how they can be influenced.

The new, comprehensive Mechanisms of Action in Group-based Interventions (MAGI) framework [NIHR EME 14/202/03; final report in press] describes and classifies features and active elements of group-based behaviour change interventions. But while the MAGI framework represents an important step in recognising and harnessing the unique effects of group dynamics in behavioural interventions, whether and how this could lead to better clinical outcomes has yet to be tested in practice.

This project will combine leading research in behavioural and implementation science to address important questions regarding the importance of specific behaviour change techniques and group processes in driving behavioural outcomes, and the degree to which group-level dynamics and outcomes can be influenced.

The successful applicant with work with experienced supervisors to: (1) co-create (with facilitators and group participants) and pilot training and resources for group facilitators to implement core elements of the MAGI framework, and (2) evaluate the impact of this on facilitator practice, group processes and behavioural outcomes.

The evaluation will involve qualitative and quantitative measurement of fidelity to protocols and reasons for/consequences of variation among facilitators and participants, alongside generating evidence of causal links between use of group-based behaviour change techniques and group dynamics (i.e., do specific techniques reliably lead to similar processes across different groups?).

The project will be informed by complexity theory to provide a realist perspective on what is achievable in the implementation of behavioural science within systems as diverse, complex and variable as group-based behavioural support.

In addition to academic outputs, the project will be a first step towards translating what is a very complex, detailed framework into practical guidance for intervention designers and facilitators and thus have the potential for significant real-world impact on the design and delivery of group-based interventions. In order to enhance this impact we will work closely with a steering group including

public health teams who commission group-based services (e.g., weight management, exercise referral), public/patient representatives, leading behavioural scientists involved in the original MAGI project and exercise physiologists.

IMPORTANT: In order to apply for this project, you should apply using the DTP's online application form: https://cardiff.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/gw4-biomed-mrc-dtp-student-2019

More information on the application process may be found here:
http://www.gw4biomed.ac.uk/doctoral-students/

APPLICATIONS OPEN ON 24 SEPTEMBER AND CLOSE ON 23 NOVEMBER 2018.

You do NOT need to apply to the University of Bath at this stage – only those applicants who are successful in obtaining an offer of funding form the DTP will be required to submit an application to study at Bath.