

# Paul Willis podcast series: transcript

## Part 2: How does collaborative research with older people strengthen research?

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Access the podcast audio and other resources related to the LOASCA project here: <https://www.scie.org.uk/older-lgbtq-people-and-social-care/loasca/>

### **Professor Paul Willis**

Hello and welcome to part two of our podcast series on collaborative social care research of older people. I'm Paul Willis from Cardiff University. In the first episode, we looked at why we should embark on collaborative research of older people and some of the benefits it brings. This time we'll be focusing on how these contributors helped shape research design, worked with the core teams to iron out a few wrinkles and greatly enriched outputs from both studies. As before, we'll be hearing from older people contributing to the SWOP and the LOASCA studies.

### **Reshma**

I contributed to ensuring that the older people were not seen as cases. We wanted people to be recognised as people.

### **Nargis**

I think my contribution was mainly to actually look at whether the process was transparent, the clarity was there.

### **Graham**

My contribution was in the group discussion which I felt was fantastic. We were all bouncing off one another adding to the experience.

### **Julian**

I've never been involved in a project where all the project members identify as LGBTQ and I think that makes quite a significant difference.

### **Izzy**

The degree of involvement we were allowed to have was amazing. I didn't anticipate there would be that level of input.

### **Professor Paul Willis**

SWOP is the first dedicated research study to focus on what social workers for older people actually do in day to day practice. Here's Dr Denise Tanner, the principal investigator on what they set out to do.

### **Dr Denise Tanner**

The aim of the research was really to try and get as close as possible to social work practice with older people. So we did interviews with the social workers in each of the sites. We also interviewed some of the older people that those social workers were working with, their carers or family members and other professionals, who were involved in that work as well. So that was like a second strand, really, the interviews. We also obtained what we call 'documentary data'. So that was mainly the records that were kept off the social work that had gone on with those older people.

### **Professor Paul Willis**

Gerry Nosowska, from the consultancy Effective Practice, was co-investigator on the SWOP study and supported the expert advisory panel.

### **Gerry Nosowska**

So in terms of keeping it real, they brought their own voice and viewpoint to triangulate with the researchers and with the practitioners to make sure that we were really focused in on older people at the centre of everything. And they acted as critical friends because they really pushed us as a project to do the best we possibly could and to be as faithful and kind of clear about what older people's experiences were.

### **Dr Denise Tanner**

They did really change how we framed our understanding. There is nothing like being on the receiving end to understand what it's really like.

### **Professor Paul Willis**

Dr Jason Schwab, principal investigator on the LOASCA project, also felt they were breaking new ground.

### **Dr Jason Schaub**

So the co-researchers were an integral part of this study and it was an interesting method to use. I've done other co-produced studies but didn't have as diverse and fulsome a range of engagement as this group did. So the co-researchers for this study, there was eight of them and they were all older people that identified as LGBT and we had quite a wide range of identities represented. And they all had experience of social care of one of two ways, either receiving social care or providing social care.

### **Professor Paul Willis**

LOASCA Research fellow Dr Dora Jandric underlines how important this was to throw light on groups that are often overlooked or invisible in social care provision.

### **Dr Dora Jandric**

For this specific study, I think it was really important to have our co-researchers because we were interested in looking at a very sensitive topic and vulnerable population that is still invisible in academic research, especially when it comes to social work. And having people with experience who can then guide us through this process to make it approachable to participants, to put in their experiences and to draw from them and to have the knowledge, both professional and personal, was really great.

### **Professor Paul Willis**

The teams were determined to make participating as accessible and flexible as possible. As Gerry and the SWOP advisors describe.

### **Gerry Nosowska**

So we did have to think carefully about how to make sure everyone was included. That included people with hearing impairments or sight impairments and people who were unwell at times, people experienced personal difficulties during the course.

### **Nargis**

That's right because the flexibility is quite important because being a carer, you don't know when you are actually needed.

### **Reshma**

I had to take some time out because I had a bereavement. I found that the research team were really, really supportive.

### **Graham**

In terms of visual impaired people, often information is not accessible. But Gerry was so good at making sure everyone had information in a manner that they found they could cope with.

### **Nargis**

Even though as a professional I was very, very confident, but when I'm dealing with social workers, I feel powerless. Since I have been actually participating in this project, I felt that now I should actually speak up and I have got a voice and yes, my, the opinions are being valued.

### **Reshma**

Even though the researchers looked scary at first, on the first meeting, it soon became apparent that they wanted to learn from us.

### **Graham**

Older people have been so undervalued, so under-resourced. Ageism is a real issue. We were looking for people to be sufficiently comfortable, at ease, that they were able to speak for themselves.

### **Professor Paul Willis**

There's a wealth of experience out there that we risk missing if we're not inclusive in our research design. However, doing research collaboratively, although rewarding, is not likely to be the easiest path at the outset. You need to be prepared for bumps in the road. As Denise shares.

### **Dr Denise Tanner**

Certainly for me, the project was my baby. You know, it took a long time to get the funding and took a long time to get through the ethics and so on, all those all those processes you have to go through. So then to take it to this group who were standing slightly further away and for them to say things that were criticising your baby, it was quite hard.

### **Professor Paul Willis**

But Denise doesn't shy away from challenges and worked with Gerry on recruitment to the group.

### **Gerry Nosowska**

Finding the right people for the group is really, really essential. Whilst research needs to be really open and encourage new people to come through and be part of it, it is really crucial for a project to make sure that people really know what to expect.

### **Professor Paul Willis**

For Jason and the LOASCA project, getting early buy-in from the co-researchers was vital to manage the expectations for the whole team.

### **Dr Jason Schaub**

So the co-researchers were a part of the research team from the very beginning of the study, which meant that they were able to be part of the project design which would include the interview questions. When we moved into data collection, they undertook many of the data collection tasks. So they were the interviewer in lots of circumstances in discussing with a professional, for example. And they undertook all of the data collection tasks across that, with the engagement of members of the rest of the research team.

### **Professor Paul Willis**

Working alongside Jason, Dora offered support to the co-researchers. This included providing training on research methods.

### **Dr Dora Jandric**

So our primary group of older LGBTQ+ people were the co-researchers. On the basis of their experience with social care, but also as self-identifying as LGBTQ+. We provided training for them to teach them or in some cases just to remind them, because some of them did have academic backgrounds about how to do qualitative interviews, how to do data collection, how to think about themselves. We talked a lot about ethics and self care because it is a sensitive topic and it is a vulnerable

population. So we wanted to make very sure we were kind of a safe space to go to if they encountered any issues.

### **Professor Paul Willis**

One of the common issues raised by co-researchers and advisory panel experts is that universities aren't necessarily set up for the collaborative way of working.

### **Julian**

We all felt sometimes the challenges were at a kind of institutional level. So with for example HR processes, we have this atypical identity in that we're co-researchers. Are we employees or not employees? How does that work? And it seemed to take HR quite a long time to get their heads round this.

### **Cecilia**

HR processes are amplified for trans people because of the right to work checks and the right to reside checks that the Home Office require. And the HRs, it always makes me laugh that they all say they're trans friendly, the institutions but when it comes to the nuts and bolts, they're anything but.

### **Professor Paul Willis**

Although it shouldn't have been necessary, our co-researcher who identifies as a trans woman, did feel she had to fight her corner.

### **Dr Dora Jandric**

She asked for one named individual to look at her documents because she had some negative experiences from other universities where they asked for her previous name and she obviously didn't want to use that name anymore. And it took us, I think, two months just to settle that. So we set a precedent saying, you need to have some sort of system for onboarding trans people because this doesn't work.

### **Professor Paul Willis**

Another hurdle for some was dealing with new technology where you might assume that the younger team members would assist the older team members. But Dora found some great collaboration here too.

### **Dr Dora Jandric**

Thankfully one of the co-researchers is the most tech savvy person I have ever met and he was also a very big help in helping others how to do all this IT stuff.

### **Professor Paul Willis**

In spite of a few hiccups along the way, setting out to work collaboratively was, on balance, a massively positive way of doing research with a great variety of outputs.

### **Dr Jason Schaub**

I have to say probably the most exciting experience that I had with them was the Sexuality and Social Work conference that happened in July 2023 in Glasgow. And we took all of the co-researchers that were employed on the project to the

conference and they were really excited to be talking about things that they were really passionate about.

### **Reshma**

When looking at the website, you can actually see that it's our words as well as the researchers' words. And that was really important to me that our voice was heard.

### **Nargis**

When the final report came, which was very, very comprehensive and looked quite impressive, I'm feeling quite proud of it that I have taken part, not as a professional but as a carer.

### **Graham**

To have actually heard it and taken it on board, it was a really truly remarkable experience.

### **Professor Paul Willis**

Hearing feedback like this, showing how diverse voices really strengthened our two studies, makes you wonder why you'd ever do this type of research any other way. For the final podcast in this series of three, we're going to be focusing on the crux of what we're looking for. What does good inclusive social work with older people look like?