



THE IMPACT OF EXPERTS BY EXPERIENCE IN THEIR WORK WITH SUBSTANCE ABUSERS AND CONVICTS

A qualitative study to investigate the influence of Experts by Experience on organizations.

SIIRI UINO

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Malmö University
Faculty of Health and Society
205 06 Malmö

ABSTRACT

Substance abusers and convicts have beneficial knowledge that researchers and service providers could use. Unfortunately, they tend to suffer from the stigma that often comes with exclusion from society and public discussions. Excluding them from discussion means that their knowledge cannot be benefitted from.

The Experts by experience concept gives a voice and expertise to those who have experience of specific experiences and situations. The use of these Experts has been found highly beneficial for many health service providers, and some findings indicate promising results also with a target group of substance abusers and convicts.

This study aims to investigate the impact that the participants of Keijo, an Experts by Experience program in Finland, can bring to their workplaces where they work with substance abusers and convicts. This paper performed seven semi-structured interviews with organizations that have worked with Experts by Experience from the Keijo program.

The analysis of this paper found the use of Experts by Experience in organizations to be considered valuable and beneficial. The findings indicated that the Experts had a positive impact on their clients, which often supported the work of the organizations. Additionally, the importance of Experts was also recognized as an important and valuable source of knowledge for the organizations and their colleagues.

This study will conclude by encouraging further use and research of Experts by Experience with this target group.

Keywords: Convict criminology; Expert by Experience; Impact; Keijo education; Thematic analysis

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Introduction

“To know the reality, one must oneself have been a prisoner”
(Kropotkin, 1887, as cited in Earle 2016)

Kropotkin, a Russian anarchist who studied prison systems, was later valued for this work in Convict criminology (Earle, 2016). This comment makes a statement on how knowledge can be achieved. Knowledge has been broadly discussed in history and within multiple disciplines such as sociology. Sociology of Knowledge focuses on understanding the relationship and mechanisms that social contexts and cultures have on knowledge and our understanding of it (Merton, 2005). Sociologist Robert Merton has added to this discussion the components of Insiders and Outsiders. Insider group represents the social elements one lives in and knows its culture, traditions, and way of living. The outsider group represents the others who don't belong to the same insider group. This means that one lacks knowledge of the outside group, which lives with other social contexts and reality. One in the inside group cannot access the knowledge of the one in the outside group and vice versa. Therefore our knowledge is limited. To sum up– to understand others, one must be them (Merton, 1972).

This discussion about knowledge and access can be found present in the underlying principles of the Convict criminology (CC) approach, which argues that a person needs to experience the situation to know what that situation includes (Earle, 2016). The convict criminology approach is a reaction to Criminology and Criminal Justice systems which are historically mainly constructed and maintained by people who have no connection or experience with criminality (Ross & Copes, 2022). Therefore, the CC approach aims to include the voices of convicts in public discussions (Larsen & Piché, 2012), as well as to break down the stigma (Ross J. et.al., 2016). Their ambition is to offer new innovative approaches to the research of crime by including the convicts in the conversations (Cox & Malkin, 2023). They see that convicts' knowledge can support creating more effective policies and services (Ross & Copes, 2022).

One concrete way of including the convicts in discussions is the use of the *Expert by experience* (EbE). As the title indicates, the expertise of these people comes from their lived experiences. They turn their experiences into knowledge and use this expertise by sharing it with others (Lindström & Rantanen, 2021). Research has strongly focused on the use of EbE in healthcare, and the findings show that EbEs have supported greatly healthcare services (McDonald et.al., 2023). There is some limited research done on former convicts using their knowledge to support others which has also proven significant support for example on the identity of the convicts (Nixon, 2020).

The important role of EbEs have been acknowledged especially within healthcare, but further research on understanding how EbEs, with criminal backgrounds, influence and impact their work and workplace is needed. This research could

give valuable and first-hand insight to actors who are working specifically with this type of target group.

The idea of investing in convicts and substance abusers, and seeing the potential knowledge that they carry, is demonstrated in an Expert by Experience (EbE) training program called Keijo. This Expert by Experience training in Finland aims to see the convicts and former substance abusers as potential individuals from whom organizations and institutions can be able to learn. As this program is relatively new, no deeper research has been done to examine the impact and influence that this program's participants have on their workplace when they work as Experts. This paper aims to therefore gain an understanding of the impact and influence that the participants of the Keijo program can have in their workplace while working as Experts. This will also offer new and relevant information on how the EbEs can impact when working with substance abusers and convicts.

Aim and research question

This paper aims to examine and investigate the impact and influence of the participants of the Expert by Experience training program called Keijo, in their workplace. The paper aims to gain an understanding of how the Experts are perceived in their workplaces and how they impact their workplaces.

This paper aims to answer the following questions:

1. How are the Experts by Experience contributing to the work of the organizations where they work as Experts?
2. How are the Experts influencing and impacting their workplace?

Background

Convict Criminology approach

The convict criminology (CC) approach is relevantly new in the field of Criminology, as it has only been around a couple of decades (Earle, 2016). Originally it aimed to challenge the existing Criminal Justice System and the field of Criminology as they were mainly produced and maintained by people without experience or connections to criminality (Ross & Copes, 2022). The CC approach is a response to this, as it aims to challenge the old ways of thinking and offer a new approach to crime research (Cox & Malkin, 2023). Additionally, the approach wants to tackle the negative image that convicts are challenged by (Ross, et.al.2016), or even discriminated against by society (Lenza, 2012). Instead, the approach wants to focus on the potential that former offenders have due to their experiences. These experiences that have given them new types of knowledge, that cannot be gained from reading (Earle, 2016). Overall the CC approach aims to include the voice of convicts in public discussions where they are often ignored and shut down (Larsen & Piché, 2012).

The theoretical roots of the approach lie in critical criminology (Ross & Copes, 2022). The approach grew from activism where actors started to question the existing Juridical Systems and how crime was handled and seen in general. It was a reaction against the labeling of convicts and their stigma (Earle, 2016) (Ross, et al., 2016), and instead acknowledging the possible potential and knowledge within them. The odonatological roots come from the view that a person needs to experience it to have knowledge about it (Earle, 2016).

Since convict criminology has its roots in actively questioning the prison system and the length of incarceration, the adaptability of the approach might be easier in locations where the punishment system is focused more on rehabilitation and less on captivity (Earle, 2016).

Concept of Experts by Experience

The concept of Experts by Experience (EbE) is seen to have its roots in a general discussion on expertise and knowledge. What and who is an expert? The definition of expertise has been discussed a lot within the discipline of science, where the source of knowledge is constantly debated. Within this discussion, education has often been weighted strongly, but experience has also become recognized as a valuable source of expertise (Caudill et.al., 2019). Knowledge from experience is for example recognized as a source of tacit knowledge, which is considered to be knowledge that is hard to describe or define (Gascoigne & Thornton, 2014). Historically the road to the recognition of the importance of including people with experience was impacted by the social movements. Feminism has for example played a role when including women in policy-making and service development, as they were able to give and share their knowledge from being a woman (Videmšek, 2017). Today, many have acknowledged experience as an important source of knowledge that can be beneficial for science and research.

The service users of health and social services have become an important part of social work as well as the general discussion about the services (Toikko, 2016). It has also been recognized that EbEs bring positive support for different health services (Happell et.al., 2019). The realization of the importance of including citizens better in the development of services has also increased globally among states (Brandsen et.al., 2018). On a societal level, the use of service users and their involvement in the development of society and its structures can bring additional legitimacy to the governance (Meriluoto, 2018).

Expert by Experience (EbE) is based on the idea that people with personal experience convert their history to expertise (Lindström & Rantanen, 2021). The gained knowledge from previous situations will be transformed into knowledge that the people possess. One becomes then an expert as one has experience from the inside of that situation as they have lived through the experiences, instead of observing or reading about them. Their knowledge from these situations can

therefore be beneficial, as their insight and perspectives can offer valuable insight to different actors who lack personal experience.

Previous research has proven that EbEs have offered valuable knowledge to different service providers (Kerry et.al., 2023), improved the structures of health care (McDonald et.al., 2023), and contributed to the creation of new and relevant knowledge (Soronen, 2024). EbEs have also managed to support the education of social workers, as they have positively managed to influence students' attitudes toward mental health illnesses (Happell et.al., 2019).

The Expert by Experience concept seems to also support the individuals who have turned their experiences into expertise. Research has demonstrated that EbEs are often positively impacted by their expertise role. The work as an EbE can bring empowerment, well-being, support in the establishment of a new identity (Soronen, 2024), hope and dreams (Regler, 2023), and confidence (Kerry et.al., 2023). The process of becoming an EbE can also be a challenging process for individuals. They need to be able to convert past experiences into knowledge, in a way that will support their well-being and recovery, and not cause harm (Jones & Pietilä, 2020).

The use of EbEs in correctional services can also be beneficial (Lindström & Toikko, 2022). The EbEs can give valuable knowledge to different rehabilitation services which can improve their effectiveness. The use of EbEs can therefore be highly beneficial, in countries that focus on rehabilitation. Finland's Juridical System focuses strongly on rehabilitation and crime prevention (Lappi-Seppälä, 2017), where prison sentences are used moderately (Sirén & Savolainen, 2013). This type of system and their social services can therefore gain valuable knowledge from EbEs. The concept of EbE is also well-known and used in Finland and its use has been supported by political actions (Soronen, 2024). For this environment, the use of EbEs in correctional services seems structurally possible, convenient, as well as beneficial.

Expert by Experience program Keijo

The Keijo program got started from a two-year-long project, that aimed to structure and establish an educational model for former substance abusers and convicts, to become Experts by Experience (ESR, 2020). For the participants, the project aimed to improve their employment and/or support their placement for further studies (Laurea, 2020). The project duration was from 2018 to 2020, and it was funded by the European Social Fund (ESR, 2020). The project was a joint project together with Valo (coaching association), Silta (coaching association), and Laurea University of Applied Sciences. The training was offered in two locations in Finland. Within the timeline, the project managed to establish an educational model that is currently offered as training.

Currently, the program is offered yearly by Laurea University of Applied Science, and twice a year by Silta in Finland (Kokemustiedon Keskus, 2023). The

participants of the training are chosen from interviews, and it is expected that the participants are in the process of desisting from crime and substance abuse. The program includes a three-month-long study part which is followed by a three-month-long practical training part in organizations that can benefit from their field of expertise. The theoretical study part includes a lot of creative methods such as theatre, creative writing, and improvisation (Kokemustiedon Keskus, 2023).

The essential value that the educational model has, is in seeing the participants as individuals with potential and strengths. The structure of the model will offer peer support for the participants as they can support each other throughout the training by sharing experiences. It aims to break down the stigma that is often present in the lives of convicts (Laurea, 2020), and to focus on improving the independence and societal involvement of the participants (Laurea, 2018). From the education and training, the participants will then learn how to use their knowledge as expertise and how to share it with other people and actors (Laurea, 2020). Additionally, after the education, the training aims to open new job opportunities for the participants (Laurea, 2020). This educational program was the first educational Expert by Experience program with this purpose and extent in Finland (Lindström & Rantanen, 2021).

The Keijo program received an award *Criminal Work of the Year 2021* by RETS (Crime-Free Life Support Foundation in Finland) (RETS, 2021). The award recognized a positive impact on the participants of the program, as well as on the organizations where the EbEs have worked. This type of recognition seems encouraging for further investigation and assessment of the program and its impact. By further investigation, can this recognition be evaluated. The Keijo program has also seemed to empower and support the desisting process of the participants (Lindström & Rantanen, 2021). In Finland, service users have been already included in the development of different services in the past twenty years (Lindström & Toikko, 2022), and now with programs like the Keijo, can correctional service providers benefit as well.

Methods

This paper has used a qualitative design that uses a thematic analysis tool. This method is commonly known and used within different disciplines (Vaismorandi & Snelgrove, 2019). Thematic analysis tool offers a good and practical tool for analyzing data, and it's therefore often recommended tool for conducting qualitative analysis (Swain, 2018). This presented method was chosen due to its compatibility with the aims of this paper.

The qualitative data has been collected through semi-structured interviews and is analyzed with a thematic analysis tool. The thematic analysis aims to respond to how the respondents experience reality (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The use of this tool offers a systematic way of coding the data from the interviews (Braun & Clarke 2014). Overall, thematic analysis offers a good tool for the analysis, as

long as the coding of the themes is well-contemplated and chosen (Braun & Clarke, 2014).

Interviews and the Process

The process of the interviews started by contacting Laurea University of Applied Science, to gain better knowledge of the Keijo program and their partnering organizations. The majority of the organizations' contact information was shared by Laurea, due to their first-hand information about it. Overall eight different individuals were asked to participate in the interviews. One organization had two different teams that were contacted. This means that overall seven different organizations were contacted. Only two of the contacted individuals did not show interest in participating in the interviews. Completely six interviews with six different organizations were conducted.

The organizations were contacted via email which included an information letter. The information letter offered important information about the aims and structure of the research, data collection, and ethical regulations (see Appendix 1). The Appendix 1 letter is a translation of the original letter that was in Finnish. The interviews were conducted by using Malmö University Zoom.

The interviews were structured as semi-structured interviews. Meaning that they followed a predetermined structure, which allowed the interviewer to step outside of the script (Berg, 2004). This structure supports data collection by ensuring that general data will be equally collected from the respondents (Korzeniowska et.al., 2023). An interview guide was drafted and used when doing the interviews (see Appendix 2). The interview guide focused on getting information on the roles of the EbEs and on the impact that the participants have noticed in their use of EbEs. The guide worked as a good structure in the interviews, although the discussions did not often follow it closely due to the flow of natural conversations.

Participants

Overall six different organizations were interviewed. Two of the interviews included two interviewees, while other interviews included only one interviewee. In one of these interviews which included two people, this paper was able to only include one of the participants. The content of the other ones' comments was unsuitable for the purpose and aims of this paper and could compromise the confidentiality of the participant. Due to this factor, this participant was excluded from the paper. Therefore this paper has excluded this person's comments and they will not be used. Overall seven people's comments from the interviews will be analyzed in this paper.

All six organizations that were interviewed support the rehabilitation of substance abusers and convicts. They are working within organizations of social services in areas of; homelessness, youth criminality, substance abuse, women and substance,

criminality, and supported living. This means that all of the organizations work closely with vulnerable groups of people where encountering, meeting, and working with their clients is strongly present in their daily work.

Most participants had several years of experience working with vulnerable people of different ages. The majority of respondents were working in team leader or manager positions, coordinating the work of their teams. Despite the similar field of the organizations, their working hours and work methods had some differences as they offered their services to slightly different target groups. This impacted the organizations' work environment and organizational structure, which had implications for the way their EbEs worked.

Additionally, one interview was conducted with a person from the Laurea University of Applied Science. Laurea University has had a strong role in the creation and establishment of the Keijo educational model, and they currently offer the Keijo training. This interview was beneficial in understanding the program and the view of the University. They were also able to share information on how the organizations have communicated with them, offering another type of aspect.

Overall this paper had six interviews with the organizations that are using EbEs and one interview with personnel from Laurea University. This paper has therefore used data from a total of seven interviews.

Material and data from the interviews

The seven interviews were transcribed into texts within 1-2 days after the interviews. The transcripts were done as soon as possible, as this supports the data collection and the accuracy (Abfalter et.al., 2021). The transcripts were then coded (1-7) so that the anonymity of the participants remained private throughout the paper. All the interviews and transcripts were conducted in Finnish as it is the native language of the respondents and interviewer. The use of native language in interviews is known to increase the quality of the results (Abfalter et.al., 2021).

The interviews lasted from 30 min to 50 min, and on paper, they reached a total of 99 pages. The transcripts followed the original wording of the interviews as closely as possible, including spoken language and most of the repetitions. Only some of the largest repetitions were excluded from the transcript if they didn't give any content to the text. The quotations, presented in the paper, are translated from Finnish to English. The translations try to respect the original wording and meaning of the sentences by also representing the content and meaning of the quotations as clearly as possible. Considering the great language differences between Finnish and English, the main importance was put on grasping the content of the sentence, not so much on how it was said.

Analysis of the Interviews

The analysis of the interviews was performed with the support of the Thematic analysis tool. This paper has specifically followed the thematic analysis instructions shared by Braun and Clarke (2006). Braun and Clarke's paper offers clear instructions and it has become a highly used and cited academic paper (Hole, 2023). As pointed out by Braun and Clarke (2006), the theoretical framework of a paper can be various, but it needs to have one. This paper will conduct a realist thematic analysis, meaning that it aims to report how the respondents experience reality (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This guided the thematic analysis when searching for repeating themes from the interviews.

The process of producing analysis needs to be flexible so that it can suit best for the intended research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This paper started the process by familiarising the collected data, reading through the written transcripts of the interviews, and listening to them. The next phase focused on searching for themes, which was continued by reviewing them carefully. This was followed by a phase of defining and naming the themes that would lastly be analyzed.

The search for themes was performed manually, by going through the transcripts of the interviews. Excel was used to support this process, as the data was gathered there. Relevant themes as well as subthemes were identified after careful consideration.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations must be considered when conducting research that includes people (Robson, 2011). This research took into consideration the regulations of the Swedish Research Council (2017). Since this paper did not aim to gather any type of personal information from the interviews, or any information on the respondents that could potentially be harmful to the respondents, this paper did not need to apply for the Ethical Commission's approval.

The interviews and the process of interviews followed carefully the general regulations and recommendations offered by the Swedish Research Council (2017). The aim of the study was made clear and transparent to the participants when sending the information letter (see Appendix 1) together with the consent form and the Zoom link. The information letter stated clearly the aims of the interviews so that the participants would get the clearest possible image of it. The letter included relevant information about the data collection and informed the participants about the use of the dictaphone, and the process of transcript. The preservation of the data, as well as its eradication after its use, was stated in the letter. Lastly, the participants were informed clearly that the interview was fully voluntary and they could resign from the participation at any given time.

Interviews were recorded by dictaphone and later on, transcribed into text. All the data was handled and stored carefully. All the data will be removed accordingly after the publication of this paper.

Findings

It became apparent from the interviews, that the EbEs have two clear groups that are impacted and influenced by their work as Experts. These two groups are displayed as the main themes. The findings indicated that EbEs have an impact on the clients of the organizations where they work, as well as on their workplace/organization and colleagues. The subthemes demonstrate the ways *how* they impacted and influenced these groups, according to the responses.

The findings of the thematic analysis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Themes	Subthemes
1. EbE's relationship to Clients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Possibility to relate b. Gaining trust c. Hope and motivation d. Challenges
2. EbE's relationship to Workplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Professional learning b. Support the work of professionals c. New knowledge and insight d. Challenges e. Work method

EbE's Relationship to Clients

All the respondents agreed on the positive impact that EbEs have on their clients when they work as Experts in their organization. The respondents indicated that the EbEs were relatable for their clients, which often opened new possibilities for future work and relationships with clients. The EbEs appear to gain the trust of the clients more easily and faster than the professionals tend to gain. The Experts were also seen to have a positive impact on the clients, as they were seen as role models that bring motivation and hope to them. All the responses saw the EbEs to have a positive impact on their clients, yet some minor challenges were acknowledged by the respondents.

“ It's just a fact that the world of crime and drugs is somewhat closed world with

their culture. So that if you haven't lived there – There are many things you just don't understand...” (1)

a. Possibility to relate

EbEs seem to create a feeling of relatability among their clients. When the clients meet a person with similar background and experiences, who works in an organization that aims to support them, it seems to help them to open up. They have someone who can relate to their situation through their experiences. Overall the respondents noted that the EbEs experiences seemed to embody different types of skills and abilities to encounter their clients than the professionals without the experience. The relatability seems to support the ability of EbEs to encounter the clients more deeply.

“Everyone can learn from Experts by Experience, everyone. They usually have exceptional encountering skills” (6)

This ability to relate often seemed to also lead to other positive reactions from the clients (see part *Gaining trust*). Being relatable has then facilitated further communication and work between the clients and the organization.

“This is one the classic ones but true; often the ability to relate on an emotional level is different when you have own experience, and this can support the building of trust faster than otherwise” (1)

Clients' ability to relate with the EbEs seems to create an environment where the client is more open to sharing their thoughts and emotions. Therefore EbEs seem to facilitate discussions with the clients in a way that makes the client more open to further support. The EbEs might manage to open possibilities for discussion with the clients that might not have existed in the same way without the presence of EbE.

“... it somehow lowers the women's shame to join into the conversation, and from there, somehow the shame and stigma melts away...” (4)

b. Gaining trust

As the EbEs can share their personal experiences with the clients, it appears to strengthen the process of gaining trust. The shared experiences seem to support the process of gaining trust. The clients often trust more quickly on the EbE than the professional.

“... (EbEs working) absolutely it helps with trust, like in gaining the trust,..” (4)

Since the EbEs are working as representatives of the organization, the trust that the EbEs manage to create with their clients can have a positive impact on the

client's trust in the whole organization. It might positively impact the clients' opinions of the services and service providers, and this can facilitate the work and aims of organizations.

"...their staff has also told us, that then the youth have also started to open up more to them, after discussing with EbE." (5)

Gaining trust among this target group was noted to be often highly challenging, as many of them have had bad experiences with authorities. Therefore it was noted highly positive that the EbEs managed to support so well in the process of gaining trust. This facilitates the organizations' work of supporting their clients and their recovery process.

"... the women of this target group, have quite thin trust in the professionals. And due to this, their ability to get help and support, the roads to recovery, are like stuck and broken." (4)

c. Hope and Motivation

Responses indicated, that seeing someone who has experienced similar experiences, to work in a regular job, brings hope and motivation to their clients. The clients can see that people have managed to overcome the similar challenges that they currently face, and this itself can offer new hope for their recovery process.

"... so that EbE is also creating hope and also the trust for the possibility of change."(7)

Respondents noted that the similar experience can also support the motivation of the clients since the EbEs are role models of that change. For clients, it seemed to bring more motivation to hear the words of encouragement coming from someone who has overcome the same situations than from someone without the experience.

"And when a person who has gone through it says; that since I was able to do it, so do you. In that moment, it's much more convincing, coming from that kind of person than from normal me." (2)

Overall the EbEs' role in bringing hope was often mentioned, and by all the respondents, as they saw that EbEs can bring different types of motivation and hope to the clients than the professionals can. Sometimes only meeting with a person who has been in the same situation but has overcome it, worked as a great source of motivation. The encounter with the EbE brought hope and faith for the future that the clients didn't have before.

"It brings it more visible for the clients "if he/she has managed to get out from there, so why wouldn't I"" (6)

d. Challenges

The findings indicated that the use of EbEs have overall had a highly positive influence on the clients. None of the respondents said that they had witnessed or seen a strongly negative impact that the EbEs had received from their clients. Yet, the attachment to the community of criminals and substance abusers might come with some challenges to the EbE.

“So in a way, it’s a bigger deal for the EbE, because they have to learn how to limit the people they know, and to learn a certain role as an employee.” (6)

This attachment to the community was mentioned as a challenge that the EbE needs to manage to have balance. However, this attachment to the criminal world was also noted as something that can be beneficial as then the EbEs have relevant and recent information from that world. Overall this was seen as something that the EbE needs to manage by themselves, by establishing good personal boundaries with their clients and acquaintances.

“yes they can create challenges, and being an EbE has also the bad side, and good side- that they are still attached to their communities” (5)

EbE’s relationship to the workplace

The other important impact that the respondents mentioned, was the impact of EbEs on their workplace. All respondents agreed that EbEs contribute to the organizations' work strongly and give a lot to the workplace. The findings also indicated that the EbEs are strongly respected by the organizations and that they see the value that EbEs can bring to their work. The EbEs were seen as a great source of knowledge that benefits the professionals and the whole organization.

“This year Laurea University also organized a recruitment breakfast for possible partners who would like to get EbE. The situation was that, at the breakfast, there were half as many organizations as we had EbE. And most of the organizations were left again without an EbE intern” (3)

a. Professional learning

Respondents see that having EbE colleagues is beneficial for the personnel and the professional growth of the team. The professionals can learn from the EbEs, as the EbEs can share their knowledge from their past experiences. This type of knowledge can facilitate their professional ability to understand their clients better.

"... many professionals who have never worked in pairs, have never, even the ones with long work experience, learned so much in such a short time as what they learned while working with EbE." (1)

When the EbEs share their experiences also with their colleagues, the colleagues can gain a better understanding of the challenges that their clients are struggling with. This knowledge can then extend their professional expertise.

"I feel that EbE for sure increased our understanding of drug addiction and about the situations of these individuals" (2)

b. EbE can support the work of professionals

Respondents noted that having an EbE colleague can support their team's work due to the EbEs' abilities (see part *EbE's relationship to Clients*). Since the work of the organizations is strongly based on encountering the clients, the skills of the EbEs will often facilitate these encounters. The shared past experiences and the expertise that the EbEs have on that situation might also support reading the clients' situations.

"...the one who has his/her own experience, has pretty good skills to assess the client faster" (1)

The reaction that EbEs have on the clients has also supported the work of the professionals since they have been able to divide the tasks by taking advantage of the different skills that the EbEs often have. The skills of the EbE to encounter the clients seem to facilitate further work of professionals with the clients. The EbEs can somehow gain access to the clients in a way that opens doors for further work, with the professionals as well.

" But like, the EbEs takes them out of the shell. They peel them off. So they have their own place and role in here" (6)

Interestingly bringing hope was also mentioned in the context of professionals. It was noted that EbEs work also as a positive reminder to the professionals. As these organizations work with highly vulnerable target groups where recovery is often a long process with ups and downs, the positive reminder that EbEs bring to the workplace, can also support the professionals and their work. The EbEs act as a reminder that the work of these organizations can help their clients, that their work can also have positive outcomes, and that their work matters.

"And maybe also in that, that the workgroup can benefit from gaining a positive experience with a person who has a background in substance abuse"(2)

c. EbEs share new insights and knowledge

As noted, the findings have indicated how the professionals have learned and gained new knowledge from working together with EbEs. This exchange of knowledge seems to also have a positive impact on the organizational level, as this knowledge can be beneficial for the structures and working habits of the organizations.

“... EbE might say some things like to question, ask or something. And I was like: Wow that’s so nice that someone is asking and challenging...” (2)

The EbEs were also seen as a breeze of fresh air, as they sometimes question things and habits, which supports the development of the organization. Since the EbE have experience and knowledge from the criminal world, they seem to be able to give relevant insights to professionals, which they cannot know or understand since they have not lived it. Overall, EbEs were seen to possess a lot of important knowledge that was seen as highly valuable for the organizations.

“When we think about someone with a criminal background. I have been working 8 years in this job, and 99,9 % I have learned from clients and Experts by experience” (6)

The use of EbEs have also supported the identification of issues and challenges in the organization’s services that would require better consideration. Working with EbEs has demonstrated to a couple of the organizations how gender needs to be considered better in their work when providing services. Women tend to experience and see the criminal world very differently, compared to men.

“...after we had female experts by experience, we started to grab more girls, especially from foster care, young females who were in the world of drugs. And suddenly we had many of them as our clients. And the world, world of drugs is something completely different for females.” (5)

d. Challenges

The overall respondents indicated that the EbEs are strongly seen to have a positive influence in the workplace, but they might bring some minor challenges as well. The main challenge that was mentioned by the respondents was the EbEs’ lack of professional experience. This appeared often as a lack of technological skills and a general understanding of working, as for many of the EbEs this was the first time they had ever been in a real job.

“But then we have to teach a lot about what to do, when your own story is not the only thing that you work with” (6)

The challenges that the lack of work experience brought to the organizations, were mainly seen to add some extra work to the team leaders and maybe for some team members. This challenge was mostly seen as something minor, especially in

the comparison of how much they positively gain from the EbEs. It was also noted that some individuals learned these types of skills very fast.

Another possible challenge that was mentioned by a couple of the respondents was the identity transformation that the EbEs go through when they become Expert. This meant that the new identity as an Expert and the process to it, might bring some challenges. This struggle for a new identity was in some cases demonstrated as arrogance which might challenge the work of the team.

“There is this very fine line with how much one can boost an EbE expertise, so that it doesn’t go over” (6)

e. Work method

The responses indicated that there are slightly different variations on how their EbEs work in the organizations. Yet, as all of the organizations are working directly with their clients, the fundamental role of the job is to encounter their clients and together find solutions to their client’s challenges. Overall the respondents saw that the EbEs fitted quite smoothly into their organizations and their working ways.

“And very naturally EbEs have fitted here, with their own expertise, and its’ also been bilateral. Like sharing the expertise.” (7)

All of the organizations are working in social services and they focus on supporting and helping people with substance abuse and criminal challenges, the strong role of the work of these organizations is encountering these people and trying to support them and their recovery. For this reason, it’s natural that the EbEs are also strongly working with their clients and encountering them, by offering support. The work of the EbEs focuses on client encounters, where they often support, guide, motivate, and help their clients. The working ways of EbEs seemed to be very similar to the ways how their colleagues work in the organizations.

In all of the organizations, the EbEs to suited well to the organizational structures and the organization’s needs. Some of the organizations worked in a pair model which included one EbE and one person with a professional education. As in some organizations, they did not work in pairs but had more independent roles for the EbE. This was often in line with their general working ways, and they were not changed due to the EbEs.

Discussion

This paper aimed to first understand how the EbEs are contributing to the work of the organizations, and then to investigate the impact and influence of their work as Experts. From the analysis of this paper, the findings indicate that the EbEs work similarly to their colleagues, yet the work habits between the organizations vary. Since the organizations aim to support clients who struggle with substance abuse and criminality, the job often focuses on encountering and working with their clients. These encounters play a strong role in the work of EbEs, as they use their past experiences as their expertise in these encounters.

The EbEs are often working as regular employees of the organizations, but they might have a stronger role with the clients, where they can use their expertise. The EbEs worked often in the model of pairs, where their expertise was used in meetings and encounters with their clients. This seemed to come naturally since their encountering skills were often beneficial. The EbEs were using their experiences as a tool to connect with the clients, which facilitated the work of the organization and the support of the clients. The EbEs worked with their story and by being an example, a role model.

As the findings indicate, the EbEs impact their workplace, and through their work their clients. The impact on these two groups appears differently. Clients are impacted directly by the work and role of the EbE. This means that the role of EbEs might already create an impact on the clients, and the tools that the EbEs have gained from their training are facilitating their encounters positively. The impact that happens in the workplace appears to come from the transmission of knowledge. The EbEs are impacting their workplace and colleagues through knowledge sharing. They can provide new and sensitive insight that is not accessible to the professionals as this knowledge comes from lived experiences.

Generally, EbEs were often seen to have good encountering skills with their clients. The EbEs managed to meet and encounter the clients in a way that the professionals did not. This could imply that experiences might bring some form of tacit knowledge to the experts. Tacit knowledge refers to knowledge that is hard to understand, and grants skills that are hard to explain by words (Gascoigne & Thornton, 2014). This knowledge is often referred to as personal knowledge that comes from experiences (Gascoigne & Thornton, 2014). The importance of this type of knowledge is noted to have an important role in the improvement of healthcare practices (Kucharska, 2022). The findings of this paper would also agree on its benefits, as it offers a new type of knowledge to these organizations that provide services.

The analysis of the interviews has indicated that EbEs have been able to share their knowledge in their workplace among their colleagues. These findings would indicate that the EbEs have been able to share their insider knowledge, which the organizations haven't had access to. This would mean that a tradeoff of knowledge has been achieved as the EbEs have managed to share new insights with the professionals. According to Merton's view on Insiders and Outsiders, this

type of knowledge sharing can allow an important understanding to happen (Merton, 1972). Sharing knowledge and opening the perspectives of convicts to the organizations can therefore increase knowledge and understanding, which benefits the organizations and their work.

The knowledge that the EbEs have been able to share with the organizations, has also been supporting the organizations to distinguish some important elements that should be taken into consideration in their work. The EbEs have for example managed to demonstrate the importance of gender in their work, as gender strongly impacts the clients and their recovery journey. Previous research would agree with these findings, since according to the research women who struggle with addiction have often experienced traumatic events, making the needs of women and men different in their recovery journey and needs of support (Edwards & Siller, 2024). This type of finding is highly beneficial for service providers, as research has proven that women would need services that include trauma-informed care (Greene et.al., 2024).

Overall none of the respondents have been able to identify a negative influence on having EbEs working in their organizations. Yet, as noted in the findings, the process of becoming an Expert and the new identity that will be established by the EbEs might include some challenges. The process of becoming EbE and transforming the narrative of one's identity is not straightforward, as it is always impacted by our surroundings (Jones & Pietilä, 2020). The process of this identity transformation might be therefore more challenging to some and might require more support. It would be recommended to investigate further the process of becoming EbE from the Keijo training so that a better assessment of the program's impact on the identity transformation can be established. Further investigation of this might also offer tools to support this process of new identity.

As mentioned earlier, the Convict criminology (CC) approach aims to include the former convicts in public discussion and research by giving a voice to them. This aim is followed closely by the Keijo program's aims as well. Both of them put a lot of emphasis on the potential that they see in former convicts and substance abusers, as a source of knowledge. This knowledge would be beneficial, since they have a lot of knowledge that others don't have, nor will have unless they live it. They both aim to reduce the stigma of the convicts, as stigma is often impacting strongly the convicts and their employment possibilities (Ross J.I. et al., 2016). Stigma can also impact negatively the process of desisting from crime (Moore & Tangney, 2017). The fundamental ideologies of the CC approach and the Keijo program are overall walking hand in hand, and the Keijo program could be seen as a program that follows the CC approach closely.

The convict criminology approach sees the convicts as a beneficial resource that can support society and academia by sharing their knowledge. The findings of the interviews indicate that this is true. According to the findings from the interviews, the convicts and substance abusers do have valuable knowledge that organizations can profit from. It seems that people who are struggling with substance abuse and

criminality can benefit from EbEs' work and that organizations where the EbEs are working can benefit from the expertise and skills of the EbEs.

Overall, these findings would encourage organizations and other actors to use Experts by Experience with this target group. Substance abusers and convicts have unique knowledge and skills that they have managed to gather from their experiences, and they should be included better in the discussions and society. Organizations and other actors can benefit from the knowledge that they possess. It would also be recommended to continue further investigation on EbEs use with this target group.

Limitations and future research

This paper includes limitations that should be considered when examining the results. First, it should be noted that this paper has only managed to interview people from six different organizations that are working with EbEs from the Keijo education. Laurea University has not kept any precise record of the number of organizations their EbEs have worked with, but they estimate there to be around 30-35 different organizations that have at least been interested in working with EbE (Laurea University, personal communication, April 12, 2024). As this paper has only managed to interview six different organizations from the estimated 30-35 (20-17%), further and broader research could be recommended to strengthen the findings.

Secondly, the overall positive findings and positive views towards the EbEs from the Keijo program should be reflected upon. It might be that the interviewed organizations are only representing the organizations with positive views. The ones who did not participate or were not asked to participate, might not share the same views. It could be that the organizations who didn't participate in the interviews didn't want to participate because of their more negative view. Therefore, it could be beneficial in future research to interview more of the organizations and possibly ask if there are any particular reasons for them not to participate.

Thirdly, this paper examines the impact of human behavior. This should be kept in mind when considering the findings. Since every human being is different, the EbEs should not be generalized. Some individuals are better in this type of job than others, just as it is in every job. This notion was also mentioned by all of the respondents. This type of research is always going to include some limitations, but it could be monitored better if the scope and structure of the research would allow it.

Lastly, it should be acknowledged that a qualitative content analysis always relies on a person's interpretation (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). This critique applies to this paper as well.

Conclusion

To conclude, the findings of this paper indicate that the participants of the Keijo program appear to create a positive impact with their work as Experts by Experience. The EbEs manage to support their clients in a different matter than the professionals, due to their expertise that comes from their experiences. They manage to share knowledge from their past experiences, with their colleagues and workplace, which has allowed the organizations to access this type of knowledge that only comes from the experiences. This knowledge and insight that they bring, has been valuable for their organizations.

The EbEs have managed to turn their experiences into expertise. They have knowledge that can be achieved only by experience. They use this knowledge and skills as a tool to connect with their clients, which has been received positively by the clients. Their skills often facilitate and support the work of their workplace as well as their aims. They have managed to generate positive influence through their work with their clients, as well as in supporting their workplace and the work of the team.

The findings of this paper hope to motivate further investigation into the impact that EbEs can bring when working with this target group. Further investigation on education and its role in the success of these studied EbEs should be investigated. Further understanding of the impact of this type of program will also benefit in understanding the importance of interventions targeting individuals.

Lastly, this paper wants to encourage academia and society to include convicts better in their research and open discussions. Once convicts are seen as people, and even people with potential, we all might learn a thing or two.

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Appendix 1

Form	
Information Letter	
Appendix 1	
Project title: Working title: Examining the multilateral impact of <i>expert by experience</i> – program for convicts	Date: 13.3.2024
Study manager: Siiri Uino Your e-mail siiri.uino@gmail.com	Studying at Malmö University, Faculty of Health and Society, S-205 06 Malmö, Phone +46 40 665 70 00 Education: Master of Criminology Level: Master
Information on the project: 1 Background and purpose Working title; Examining the multilateral impact of <i>expert by experience</i> – program for convicts. This research paper will be conducted by student Siiri Uino as a part of her Masters of Criminology studies at Malmö University. This thesis will aim to examine the impact of expert by experience program Keijo. It will focus on examining the impact of the program in different levels(micro-macro) as well as to understand the interlinkages between the levels. This will allow to examine the impact of the program in broader way. 2 Enquiry on participation The enquiry for the participation of this study is due to the knowledge and experience the interviewee has from their profession. The participant of this interview is employed by organisation that is working with the participants of the Keijo program. This information was shared by the coordinator of the Keijo-programme. I would like to gain further knowledge on how the organisation is working with the Keijo-participants and how the organisation has impacted from this. 3 How will the study be performed? I would like to hear from the organisations their view on using experts by experience from Keijo program, and how this has worked for the organisation. The interview focuses on collecting information from the perspective of the organisation and how the use of using experts by experience has impacted their work and the results of the organisation. The interview is therefore focusing on the professional role of the interviewee. 4 Processing data and confidentiality Since the interview focuses on the professional role of the interviewee, the paper will not include any personal information. In the thesis, the interviewee will be referred as an employee of the organisation. The interview will be recorded by Dictaphone. Personal details and collected data, will not be revealed to unauthorised persons and all the data will be destroyed after the thesis has been examined. Malmö University will be responsible for	

possessing personal data.

5 Voluntary participation

Participation to this interview is completely voluntary and you may withdraw your participation at any time without explanation. All the personal information and collected data will then be destroyed. If you wish to withdraw from the participation, please contact siiri.uino@gmail.com

6 Person responsible

For further information about the study, please contact Siiri Uino, siiri.uino@gmail.com, +35844 575 2497.

7 Confirmation of consent

With this paper, the participant is offered relevant information about the thesis. An opportunity for further questions has also been offered. The participant will sign the consent form, where she/he states their consent.

Hereby, are you willing to participate in this study?

Appendix 2

Interviews guide

Each interview is scheduled to last max. 40 min. The interviews will be conducted via Mau-zoom. The interviews will be recorded by Dictaphone and later on transcribed. The interview will be conducted in Finnish.

Introduction;

Presenting the aim of the research and explaining the focus of this interview.

1. Name and which organization?
 - a. What is the organization doing and what are the aims of the organization?
 - b. How long have you worked with the organization?
 - i. In which role?
 1. In which connection with the Keijo participants?
2. How long has your organization worked with people who are participating Keijo program?
 - a. How long have you worked with them?
3. Why and how did your organization start working with Keijo participants?

Role of experts by experience

4. What is the role of experts by experience(Keijo) in your organization?
 - a. Have your organizations used them for a long time and which types of experts? (with what background)
 - b. How would you describe the use of experts by experience at your work and in your organization?
 - i. Do you use them a lot? Or only occasionally.
 - c. What/how are they supporting your work and the aim of the organization?
 - i. How are they supposed to support the work of the organisation in reaching its aim?

Benefits & disadvantages

5. What do you see to be the benefits of using the experts (Keijo)?
6. What do you see to be the challenges/cons of using the experts (Keijo)?
7. Do you feel/see that experts by experience (Keijo) participants are supporting your organization? In what way?

Impact/reaction

8. Have you noticed any impact/reaction in the community and on the people you aim to support by using Keijo?
 - a. What are they?
9. Have you possibly seen any impact/reactions and changes that it has on the expert by experience?