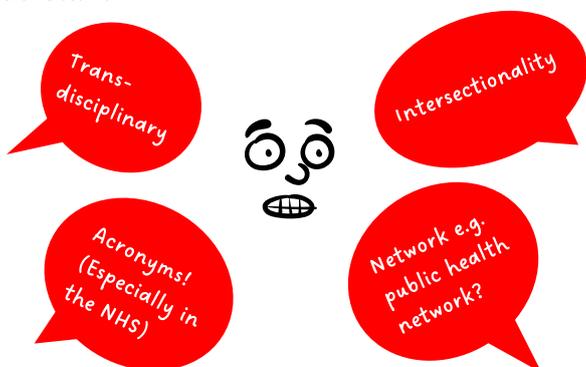# Why we need to talk about 'jargon' in mental health research

TRIUMPH

In mental health research we talk a lot about the importance of creating inclusive and safe environments where people can feel comfortable to share their thoughts and experiences. This is particularly important when mental health professionals are asking young people to participate in and co-design mental health research and interventions – professionals need to make sure they are demonstrating trustworthiness to young people that their views will be respected and affirmed. Ensuring that everyone in that space is on the same page when it comes to language and terminology is extremely important, as language – even inadvertently – can easily and quickly make people feel excluded.

'Jargon' is a term used to refer to words or phrases that are specific to a particular subject, which others who aren't specialists in that subject can find difficult to understand. The word 'jargon' has negative connotations because it can create barriers and hierarchies around who is 'in-the-know' and who is not. Mental health research encompasses a very broad range of research subjects and research methods which can involve the use of jargon such as acronyms or scientific terms that not everyone may have come across before. The use of jargon can be even more exclusionary in the context of youth mental health research, as age and education-related power-dynamics add an additional risk that young people will feel their views are not listened to. When the TRIUMPH Network hosted a youth-led conference on mental health research and activism in October 2022 (TRIUMPH Fest), we asked attendees to tell us some examples of mental health jargon they don't understand:

Trans-disciplinary

Intersectionality

Acronyms! (Especially in the NHS)

Network e.g. public health network?

We felt it was important at TRIUMPH Fest to create an equitable environment where nobody felt excluded by language and this 'jargon-busting' activity gave insight into how some of the words and acronyms we use daily may not be universally understood by people we work or interact with.
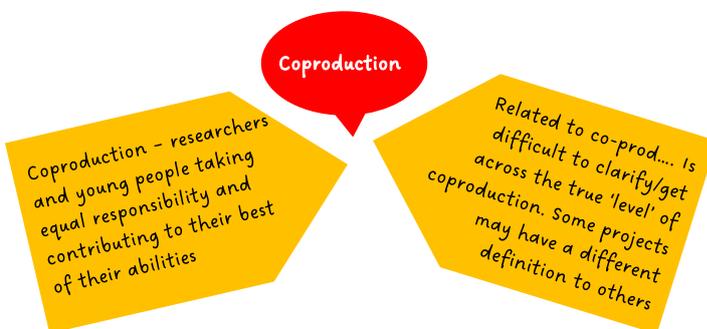
We also asked attendees to provide explanations for terms other people weren't sure of, such as:

PROM – patient-reported outcome measure (used in studies around measuring youth mental health)

Stigma: negative assumptions or preconceptions about people with mental illness that aren't true

GIRFEC: getting it right for every child

There was also recognition that some jargon was difficult to define, or that different people held different definitions of it:

Coproduction

Coproduction – researchers and young people taking equal responsibility and contributing to their best of their abilities

Related to co-prod.... Is difficult to clarify/get across the true 'level' of coproduction. Some projects may have a different definition to others

This activity demonstrated that we should avoid assuming that everyone around us understands the specialist terminology, acronyms and phrases we might be using when we talk about mental health research. On the other hand, we need to take care not to 'single out' people who may not be sure about certain words, which can feel even more exclusionary. It can be useful from the outset to encourage everyone you are working and engaging with to spell out acronyms and briefly explain terminology (even if they think everyone knows what it means) as part of an overall ethos of creating an inclusive and welcoming environment.