

# Implementing Peer Support Work into a Forensic Hospital in Germany

Caroline Benz, Peggy Walde, Birgit Völlm

Klinik für Forensische Psychiatrie, Universitätsmedizin Rostock, Germany  
Contact: birgit.voellm@med.uni-rostock.de

## Introduction

Experienced Involvement (also called Peer Support Work [PSW]) has existed in mental health care in Germany since 2005 (Bock, 2016) though its implementation lags behind, compared to other countries. Due to the unique challenges of forensic-psychiatric settings, implementation of PSW in these settings is even less developed.

## Aims

- To identify how many forensic-psychiatric hospitals in Germany have implemented PSW
- To assess the experiences with PSW in forensic-psychiatric settings in Germany
- To identify the barriers of implementation of this concept in one forensic-psychiatric hospital in Germany

## Methods

- Survey of forensic hospitals in Germany
- Interviews and focus groups: directors of forensic-psychiatric hospitals, peer support workers within these settings
- Focus groups of staff at the forensic-psychiatric hospital in Rostock (psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses, occupational therapists, security and administration staff), peer support worker in training
- Interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed for thematic analysis, analysis used Nvivo 12 (Brown & Clarke, 2006)

## Setting

The forensic-psychiatric hospital in Rostock is part of the University hospital Rostock. It opened in 2001 with 80 beds (100 beds since 2018). The hospital currently provides a placement for a PSW trainee with the view of offering employment to this person later this year.

## Results

### Survey

75 forensic-psychiatric hospitals were contacted

- 81,3% responded (N = 61)
- 91,8% of the responding institutions do not have a PSW (N = 56), but
  - 5 are planning the implementation of a PSW
- 8,9% have or had a peer support worker or are currently training someone (N = 5)

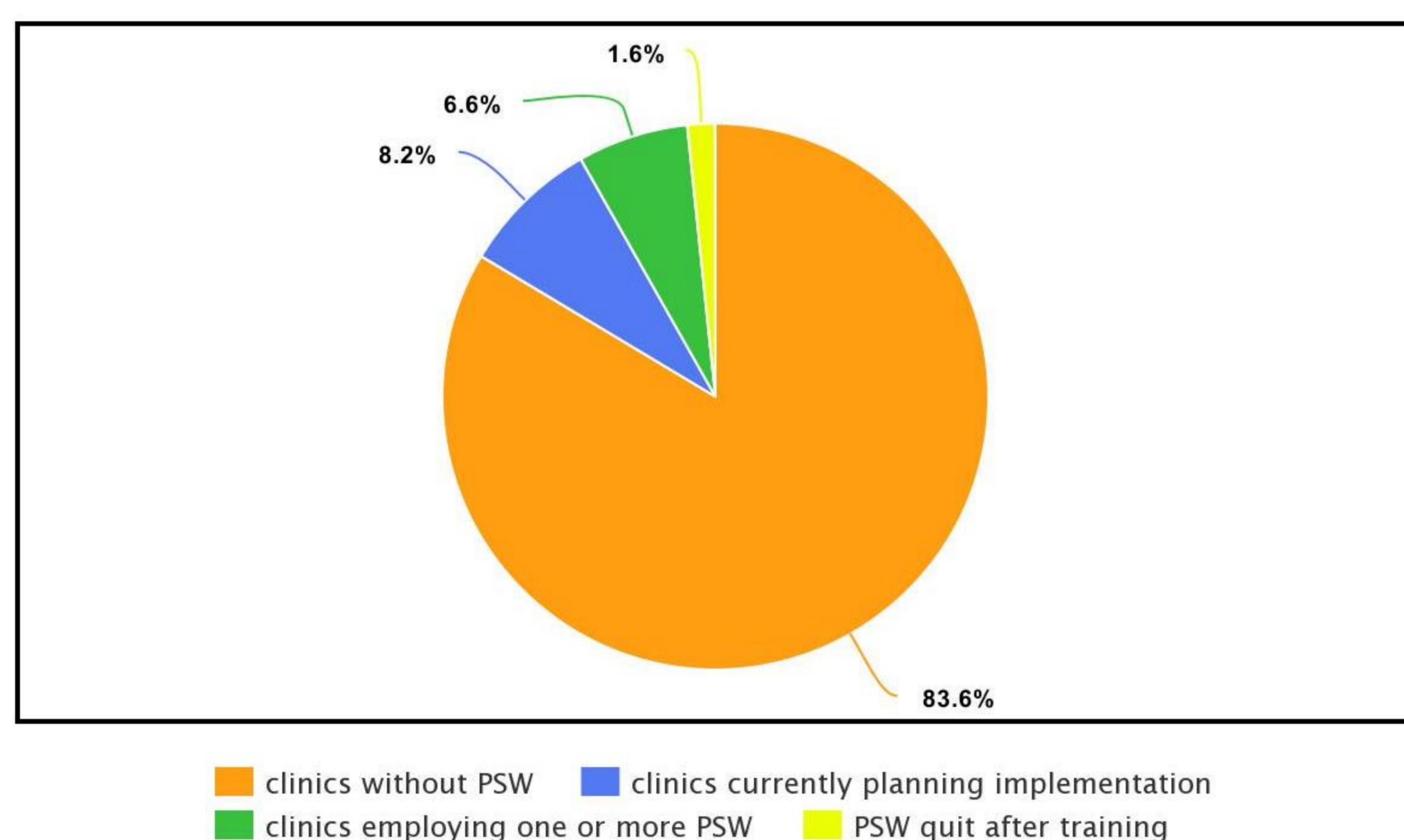


Fig. 1 Peer Support in Forensic Hospitals in Germany

## References

- Bock, T. (2016). Peer Arbeit aus anthropologischer Sicht. In J. Utschakowski (Ed.) *Vom Erfahrenen zum Experten. Wie Peers die Psychiatrie verändern* (5th ed.) Bonn, Germany: Psychiatrie-Verlag
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). *Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. doi: 10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
- Nolan, C. (2015). *Arbeiten mit Peers im forensischen Setting – Wie wirkt sich die Mitarbeit von Betroffenen auf die Patienten aus?* (Bachelors Thesis).

## Interviews with clinic directors

Themes identified include:

### Conditions

- Choosing PSW due to background/ experiences/ diagnosis (has to „fit“ the patient characteristics)
- PSW has to be treated as a team member
- Communication (educating staff about peer support and PSW about mental health care system)
- Good preparation, time

### Difficulties

- Concerns about PSW's health/ loyalty (possible relapse, dealing, passing on information to patients)
- Fear of change
- No clear budget, little payment
- Problems with patients (PSW can be perceived as „spy“)

## Staff focus groups at the forensic-psychiatric hospital Rostock

We conducted 2 focus groups (7 / 11 members) in November and December 2019. Emerging themes included:

### Conditions

- Professional distance
- Clarity of role
- Clear job description
- Transparency and communication
- Contact person for PSW

### Possible tasks

- Group Therapy
- One-on-one consultation
- Function as a moderator
  - Feedback for team
  - Motivate patients for therapy

### Concerns

- Addiction/criminal behaviour
  - Trust issues
- Might work against therapy

### Expectations

- Building trust over time
- PSW brings useful experiences

## Discussion

Peer support in forensic mental health settings is still in its infancy in Germany. There were both worries and hopes related to the project in our staff coinciding with experiences in other clinics. The results fit reports from the literature, e.g. that aspects of safety and mistrust stand in the way of more participation of patients (Nolan, 2015).

## Future research

We plan to evaluate the implementation of the prospective PSW at our hospital using focus groups with patients and staff members on the effects peer support has on each group. We will study outcomes on patients in terms of e.g. self-efficacy and quality of life and are interested in following the development of our PSW as a team member and the change in social distance from staff.

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