Research Ethics and Conflict Related Sexual Violence - Interdisciplinary Workshop

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Ethical and Methodological Issues: Research on Conflict and Post-Conflict Sexual Violence and Torture in Africa

Trinity College, Dublin
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How can we sensitively address the ethical and methodological issues that arise whilst carrying out research on sexual violence and torture in conflict and post-conflict settings?
Format of Presentation

1. Context

2. Ethical and Methodological Issues of Research: Uganda, Liberia and eastern DRC

3. Ethical framework and strategies

4. Summary
Context

- Clinical Psychologist/Associate Member of African Studies Centre.

- Applied research, training and consultancies.

- Focus on conflict and post-conflict human rights abuses: health and justice responses for survivors in Africa and UK.
Research in Uganda
Research in Uganda

- Assisted to establish MSc. in Clinical Psychology, Makerere University.
- African Psycare Research Organisation, APRO, established.
Ethical and Methodological Issues of PhD Research

- Collaboration with Isis-WICCE and community-based organisations.
- Feminist/participatory/action methods.
- Reflexivity.
- Sensitivity: gender, power & culture.
- Recruiting participants and safety.
- Negotiating ‘my position.’
Ethical and Methodological Issues of PhD Research

- Working with interpreters.
- Payment for participants.
- Identity and representing participants.
- Equalising power relationships.
- Informed consent.
- Use of focus groups and empowerment.
- Political context.
“Governance of Sexual Violence in northern Uganda” (Liebling & Baker, 2010)

- Human rights abuses ongoing.
- Kitgum Women’s Peace Initiative.
- Stigma, shame and fear.
- Number of participants.
- Dissemination.
- ‘Giving back’ to communities.
Experiences of Trauma Counselling Services in Northern Uganda: Implications for Mental Health Policy and Legislation” (Liebling & Davidson, 2013)

- Ethics and research clearance.
- Conflicting roles.
- Individual interviews and methodology.
- Care of researchers and interpreters.
- Expectations of organisations.
- Relationship building and time-scale.
- Dissemination.
Research in Liberia
Research in Liberia

- Research reviewer and policy documents.
- Training in Harper: increase capacity for medical and psychological support.
- Medical Intervention (2009).
“Health and Justice Responses for Women and Girls Bearing Children from Rape: Case study of Goma, eastern DRC” (Liebling & Slegh, 2011)

- Political context and security.
- Ensuring safety: care of participants and researchers.
- Sensitivity but challenging culture.
Research in eastern DRC

- Managing competing demands.
- Being fully briefed.
- Managing researchers and participants feelings.
- Dealing with risk issues.
- Empowering participants.
- Use of research diary.
- Ethical processes and procedures.
Ethical Framework

- Close collaboration with organisations and community engagement essential.

- Special attention to feasibility of study
  - Safety.
  - Social value-benefits.
  - Selection of participants.
  - Awareness of vulnerability.
  - Informed consent.
  - Engaged in groups/services/organisations.
Ethical Framework

- **Harm/Benefit analysis of research**
  - Importance of assessing this.
  - Respect.
  - Improvements to safety and service responses.

- **Political agendas**
  - Being fully aware of these.
  - Good briefing.
  - Account for this in analysis.
Ethical Framework

- Ethical processes and procedures
  - Independent reviews.
  - Respect local systems formal and informal.
  - Be sensitive and flexible.
  - Support and protection of research team and participants.
  - Build expertise of African colleagues and organisations.
  - International networks and mentor.
Ethical Framework

**Sustainability and Impact**

- Importance of good relationships.
- Research owned and utilised by local organisations and key stakeholders.
- Aim for full collaboration.
Ethical Framework

Culture and traditions

- Research may conflict with culture.
- Balance respect with challenge to improve practices and rights.
- Involve local leaders and organisations.
Summary

- Research consistent with international human rights and strategies that strengthen efforts to combat impunity.
- Reflexivity and negotiation for challenging ethical issues: best interests of participants.
- International research strategy.
- Increased awareness, training and capacity building required.
- Methods that empower, protect rights and knowledge utilised to improve responses.
- Sharing practice and experience.
- Duty of care for participants and research team.
Summary

1. Benefits of documenting sexual violence greater than risks.
2. Research presents least risk to participants, good methods and builds on evidence.
3. Basic care locally available.
4. Safety and security paramount.
5. Confidentiality when disclosure of human rights abuses must be protected.
6. Informed consent always obtained.
7. Research team carefully selected and trained.
8. Additional safeguards if children are involved.

World Health Organization (2007)
Thank you for listening

Any Questions?