

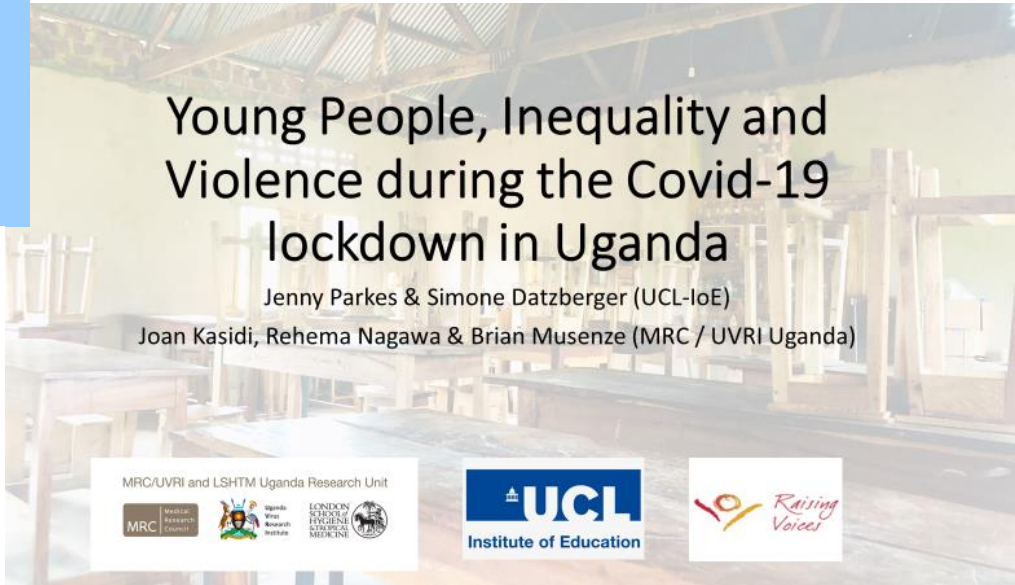
Reflections on ethical challenges in researching violence with young people

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Introduction

- Research on violence is replete with ethical and methodological challenges, particularly when involving children
- Practical guidance and tools for researching VAC, VAW and SRGBV
- Writing on research ethics in feminist, childhood studies and decolonial literature
- Learning from research partners and processes, doctoral students and Education, Gender and International Development MA students, over past 20 years
- Aim: to share and discuss ethical challenges we have encountered, and how we have tried to address these



**END
GENDER VIOLENCE
IN SCHOOLS**

- 3 year action research (2015-17) aiming to build and strengthen use of evidence on school-related gender-based violence
- UNICEF, Global Partnership for Education, and Education Ministries in Zambia, Ethiopia, Togo and Côte d'Ivoire PE, and UCL IoE



CoVAC - Contexts of Violence in Adolescence Cohort Study

- Mixed methods, longitudinal research (2017-2023) in Luwero District, Uganda – aims to build understanding on how family, peer, school and community contexts affect young people's experiences of violence in adolescence and early adulthood
- Surveys with young people 2014, 2018 (1445 girls, 1328 boys, total 2773), 2022
- Qualitative data collection 2-3 months per year (2018-2022) with 36 young people aged 15-17, and with teachers, caregivers, peers, other stakeholders.

Research as safe space for young person?

- Talking about violence is not safe – evokes memories of fear, anger, confusion, shame; potential for repercussions incl. physical dangers
- Not easy for a child to refuse consent (Alderson & Morrow 2020)
- Privacy & confidentiality (e.g. phone interviews during COVID) (Bhatia et al 2022)
- Protocol for distress – signs not always easily recognised (Morris et al 2012)
- Quantitative studies: clear, unambiguous questions; piloting in advance; computer-assisted surveys to remove the human factor



Research relationship as safe space for young person?

- Ethnographic & participatory methods, enabling young people to influence who researchers speak to, and how
- River of life interviews; community walks; mapping safety/danger zones; research groups with friends (Parkes 2009)
- Questions relating to violence, but not directly about it, so young people raise it only if they feel comfortable



Juliet (17 years): *I don't share my problems with anyone. I can only share with you."*

Joan (key researcher): *Why don't you want to share?*

Juliet: *Once I speak my problems to anyone, it feels as though I have told the whole world about it. I develop shame.*

- Building trust over time with key researcher
- Space for being listened to, without criticism, but potential for blurring role of researcher/counsellor/friend

Child Protection and Safeguarding

- High likelihood of disclosures of abuse in VAC research – feeling heard for the first time/trusting researcher with unsafe information
- Researcher preparedness – disclosure protocol with step-by-step instructions for researchers
- Legal duty to break confidence if risk of harm to self/others
- Local child protection services, phone lines/online websites, DBS clearance
- Working with partner organisations e.g. Raising Voices in Uganda – responsive, preventive and systemic
- Counsellors

Researcher safety

- Physical dangers in high violence neighbourhoods/homes
- Emotional stress
- Practical safety procedures
 - Risk assessments – location, transport, events/news (e.g. elections)
 - Travelling in pairs/groups; team leader aware of researcher's movements/locations; emergency 24 hour contact
 - Dealing with hostility/aggression e.g. from family members
- Daily debriefs
- Power dynamics within research team – codes of conduct from inception period

Who benefits?

- Violence as silencing – Research aims to expose what is hidden, to understand power dynamics surrounding violence, & contestations
- No direct benefits to participants
- Potential harm of reinforcing deficit discourses of girls in global south as victims/heroines (Mohanty 1991; Hickel 2014); men as violent (Bennett 2010); culture/family as harmful (Bessa 2019)
- Reverse the gaze – critically interrogating aid politics, colonial histories and structural complicities of UCL researchers in knowledge hierarchies/extraction/epistemic violence (Abu Moghli & Kadiwal 2021; Unterhalter & Kadiwal 2022)

Critical dialogues

- Young people, research teams, activists, teachers, governments – throughout the research – planning to publications
- Transversal dialogues with reflexivity and respect for other positions (Unterhalter 2009); humility about the limits of our positions and tools for understanding silences surrounding violence (Parkes et al 2022)
- Where/how are findings published/shared? E.g. film making with young people (Moletsane, Mitchell & Lewin 2015; Bannink-Mbazzi et al 2020); resource for NGO tools and advocacy

Conclusions

- Ways of handling ethical issues in research on violence with young people vary with different research traditions and methodologies
- Researcher qualities, training and support are key to minimize harm from research
- Research does not eradicate risks, but need to recognize and plan to reduce risks – may have cost implications
- Referral pathways and protocols in the context of limited child protection systems
- Strong partnerships with expertise on violence
- Ethics processes are frequently missing from VAC/VAW publications (Peterman et al 2022) – we need to document how we address the complex challenges of researching violence with young people, and to hold ourselves to account.

Resources

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