

Photoethnography in Community-Based Participatory Research

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Photoethnography is a method well situated to pursue the goals of community-based research. It embraces the idea of learning from research participants' lived realities, allowing for such perspectives to be documented through photo or video (Schwartz, 1989). Although not inherently a community-based method, with slight alteration it becomes one of the strongest opportunities to demonstrate the impact of social issues on individuals and communities. Such alterations integrate the participatory nature of community-based research and the contextual richness of ethnographic approaches.

This chapter begins by providing an overview of photoethnography and describing its potential within a mixed methods research design. A case study will then be presented in which the author describes the implementation of a mixed methods research initiative in Barbados. This research initiative involved the use of photoethnography (specifically the photovoice methodology), quantitative survey methods, and performance ethnography.

INTRODUCTION TO PHOTOETHNOGRAPHY

Photoethnography is situated within the larger framework of visual ethnography and may sometimes be referred to as documentary photographic research, participatory photography, visual anthropology, or visual sociology (Schwartz, 1989; Wang & Burris, 1994). Photoethnography is strongly grounded in ethnographic principles but utilizes photos as data points, as well as opportunities to access further data points (Schwartz, 1989). There are several possibilities for photography to be incorporated into the research process

(Schwartz, 1989). For instance, photography is an opportunity for social transaction, suggesting that the meaning behind the photo (from the photographer's perspective) may be just as significant as the interpretation of the photograph by the viewer. There is an interaction that takes place that cannot be overlooked and that remains an integral component of photoethnographic research material.

Schwartz (1989) considered "photographs [are] inherently ambiguous, their specifiable meanings emergent in the viewing process. This ambiguity is not a disadvantage or limitation; rather, the multiple meanings negotiated by viewers can be mined for the rich data they yield" (p. 122). In the research process, photos may be used to elicit data from participants, may be created by participants, may document aspects about communities, or may guide interviews with research participants. The use of photographs in the research process is dependent on several factors related to the research project, including the community, the issue being explored, the resources available, and the type of data being sought (Schwartz, 1989).

Some scholars classify photoethnography as "inevitably collaborative and to varying extents participatory" (Pink, 2008, p. 2). However, the strength in integrating photographs into the research process lies very much in the ability to understand and disseminate ideas from multiple viewpoints. As an approach, it allows for the understanding of both shared and distinct experiences within and across communities. It requires a strong engagement with and embracing of multiple ways of knowing social issues from multiple perspectives (Pink, 2008; Schwartz, 1989; Singhal & Rattine-Flaherty, 2006).

Embracing the Theoretical Foundation and Implementing Methods

Participatory photoethnography is built on feminist, empowerment, and social justice theories. Wang and Burris (1994) began using a method they referred to as *photo novella* to better understand health concerns among women in rural China. This method, later referred to as *photovoice*, promotes an expert role among participants and acknowledges community members as coinvestigators regarding research on the social issues that impact their everyday lives.

Photovoice utilizes a community-based participatory research (CBPR) framework, which has now become a widely used approach for conducting scientific inquiry. CBPR includes four major elements in the research process: participation, the coproduction of knowledge and control, praxis (a reflexive, iterative process in which theory and action validate each other; Prilleltensky, 2001), and equitable distribution of power (Wallerstein & Duran, 2003). Embracing these elements of CBPR, Wang and Burris (1997) began using documentary photography as an integral part of the research process. The method intends “to enable people to record and reflect their community’s strengths and concerns, to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important community issues through large and small group discussion of photographs, and to reach policymakers” (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 370).

Wang (1999) outlined the following steps for the traditional photovoice method: (a) selecting and recruiting a target audience of policymakers or community leaders, (b) recruiting a group of photovoice participants, (c) introducing the photovoice methodology to participants and facilitating a group discussion, (d) obtaining informed consent, (e) posing an initial theme for taking pictures (in the form of framing questions), (f) distributing cameras to participants and reviewing how to use them, (g) providing time for participants to take pictures, (h) meeting to discuss the photographs, and (i) planning with participants a format to share photographs and stories with policymakers or community leaders.

Photovoice projects begin with the creation of research questions, which are broken down into more concise questions, referred to as framing questions. These framing questions are simple questions related to the larger research theme and

are phrased in a way that participants are able to respond to them through photos and text. Once the participants complete the photovoice training and project orientation (which is covered in the first meeting for photovoice projects), the framing questions are presented (Wang, 1999).

Each participant takes a photograph and writes a personal narrative for each of the framing questions presented. The photos and narratives (written and later orally expanded on during the group meetings) serve as data for the research study. During the group meetings, minimal probing by the group facilitators takes place after each individual shares his or her photo and narrative to be sure that each story is understood clearly. This information is analyzed both to understand each unique story related to the project theme and to examine patterns across participants.

During each photovoice meeting a group discussion occurs as well. Facilitators have predeveloped probes that are used to guide the conversations and to gain deeper insight into the participants’ experiences with the project theme. These run similarly to focus groups, and often the facilitation questions are constructed in a way that bridges the gap between the research questions and the framing questions to encourage a critical discourse around deeper meanings and themes. This group discourse also contributes to the research data, in that group conversations are recorded and included in the data analysis.

A final step in photovoice projects includes a public outreach component in order to disseminate and act on what was learned with community leaders or some targeted audience. By connecting the voices of individuals to the people who have decision-making power, researchers can help effect social change and facilitate the engagement of community members’ voices in conversation regarding policies affecting their everyday lives (Wang, 1999).

The photovoice method is innovative for several reasons. Research participants are cocreating photos that are physical sites for learning and sharing information. It is from these creations that policy influence can happen; directly linking the photos and text to the realities of individuals, and using these photos and texts as a way to elicit change, establishes a clear path for community members to become actively engaged in influencing policy. Allowing participants to have control

over the meaning that is ascribed to the realities of their lives also prevents the implementation of misinformed policies (Wang, 1999). Furthermore, cocreating the dissemination tool allows for a participatory analysis of the data, as the emergent themes are often shared through an exhibit or digital story at this point in the study. This step prevents researchers from ascribing misinformed meaning to participants' voices, ensuring that the same oppressive power dynamics that exist in society and lead to poorly informed policymaking are not replicated within the research process (Wang, 1999).

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Method

Photovoice and other photoethnographic methods have many strengths and weaknesses, with the strengths being well suited to fulfill the goals of community psychology. For instance, such methods provide insight into the unique experience of individuals nested within communities (Schwartz, 1989; Wang, 1999; Wang & Burris, 1994). This method creates space for community-based researchers to embrace an ecological systems theory and an intersectionality approach (i.e., one that takes into account the multiple and intersecting structural systems—gender, race, religion, and so on—that shape individuals' lives (Crenshaw, 1991; McCall, 2005)).

The way in which the photovoice method in particular unfolds allows for participants to voice their lived reality, specifically in relation to their social locations and the myriad of systems within which their lives exist (Wang, 1999; Wang & Burris, 1994). However, such methods may be limited in their ability to make larger generalizations about communities or populations, as they are often intended to gain rich insight into both the disparate and shared experiences of smaller, homogenous groups and their members.

Photoethnography and Mixed Methods Designs

Mixed methods designs are defined by Creswell, Klassen, Clark, and Smith (2011, p. 4) by the following criteria: "(a) focusing on research questions that call for real-life contextual understanding, multilevel perspectives, and cultural influences; (b) employing rigorous quantitative research assessing magnitude and frequency of constructs and rigorous qualitative research exploring

the meaning and understanding of constructs; (c) utilizing multiple methods; (d) intentionally integrating or combining these methods to draw on the strengths of each; and (e) framing the investigation within philosophical and theoretical positions."

Photoethnography and photovoice provide the latter part of the second point written earlier, in that such methods provide insight into the "meaning and understanding of constructs" (Creswell et al., 2011, p. 4). However, they are lacking in their ability to demonstrate the enormity of social issues. Therefore, implementing photoethnography into a mixed methods design, specifically with survey or other quantitative methods, increases the potential significance or impact of the research.

CASE STUDY

The current project began in 2012, when the author was awarded an mtvU Fulbright scholarship to conduct fieldwork in Barbados. The original research project intended to explore issues solely related to youth sexual health. Unanticipated preliminary findings led to the research moving in a new direction, specifically toward the intersection of sexual health and gender-based violence. In using these preliminary findings, the initial project was further developed into a mixed methods, community-based participatory research initiative. Because it was not the project's original goal to explore gender-based violence, the next section will begin with a brief overview of sexual health, specifically in Barbados. Following this, the two major phases of the project, along with pertinent literature, will be provided. Figure 28.1 provides an overview of the methodological/implementation steps for each phase of the project. These

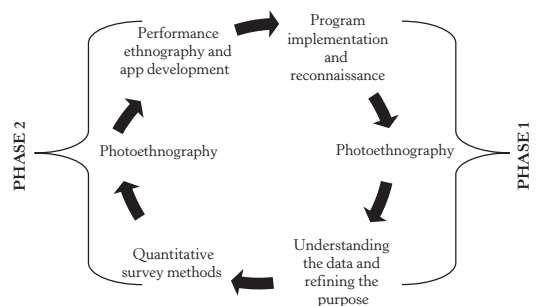


FIGURE 28.1: Overview of Phase 1 and Phase 2 of a photoethnographic community-based research project.

will be described in further detail throughout the remainder of the chapter.

Sexual Health

Sexual and reproductive health has taken many definitions throughout scholarly work but is best understood, through the World Health Organization (2006), as:

... a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. (p. 5)

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (2013) estimated that 35.3 million people across the globe are living with HIV. "There were 2.3 (1.9–2.7) million new HIV infections globally, showing a 33% decline in the number of new infections from 3.4 (3.1–3.7) million in 2001" (UNAIDS, 2013, p. 4). With more than 1 million people acquiring a sexually transmitted infection (STI) every day (World Health Organization, 2013b), controlling STIs is now considered to be at the center of HIV prevention work (UNAIDS, 1999).

Barbados, West Indies

The island of Barbados is home to approximately 273,000 people (UNFPA, 2008a). The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS has estimated that there are between 1,300 and 1,800 people living with HIV in Barbados, with an estimated HIV prevalence rate between 0.8% and 1.1% (of adults aged 15 to 49 years old). The percentage of individuals 15 to 24 years old living with HIV is estimated to be between 0.3% and 0.5% (UNAIDS, 2013). Research from the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (2010) has demonstrated that stigma and discrimination have had profound and direct effects on increased mortality rates in Barbados; many instances in which an HIV-positive individual has delayed his or her treatment are related to the experience of stigma and discrimination. Although heterosexual contact is the primary mode of transmission of HIV in

the country, at-risk groups are consistently pushed out to the periphery of health care and outreach consideration. Among these groups are sex workers and men who have sex with men (UNGASS, 2008).

Phase 1: mtvU Fulbright Fieldwork

The first phase of the project involved approximately 1 year of fieldwork. There were various components of the fieldwork, including partnership building, program implementation, and community-based participatory research. Three main steps from this phase are highlighted next.

Phase 1, Step 1: Program Implementation and Reconnaissance

The primary community partner was an organization called dance4life. dance4life is an international program that is implemented in 28 countries worldwide. A core curriculum was developed by the original program in Amsterdam, and since its inception the curriculum has been adopted by each new country program and adapted to meet each community's particular cultural context. There are four core components to the dance4life program, including inspire, educate, activate, and celebrate. Each phase represents a different purpose of dance4life; however, the most significant aspects tend to be the educate and activate stages. During these stages the youth involved in the program are taught the entire dance4life curriculum (focused on youth issues, specifically sexual health and HIV) and are expected to turn what they have learned throughout the program into some form of community action (dance4life, n.d.).

dance4life Barbados is the primary program across the island that engages youth in comprehensive sex education, using music, dance, and peer education to inspire young people to make change among themselves and their communities. Partnering with the National HIV/AIDS Commission in Barbados, dance4life has developed its curriculum to provide HIV education and to meet the context of the communities with which it works. Recently, it has expanded into new settings in addition to the secondary schools with which it already partners (e.g., collaborating with a children's home and a specialized school for girls in the juvenile justice system) (dance4life Barbados, n.d.).

The author was fully involved in the implementation of the dance4life Barbados program

in the secondary schools upon the start of the mtvU Fulbright scholarship. Participating in program delivery allowed the author to better understand the community partner's approach to sexual health education, to increase her knowledge regarding the contextual elements that impact sexual health and sexuality among young people in Barbados, and to gain access to secondary school students to recruit for the next step of the first phase of the project.

Phase 1, Step 2: Photoethnography

The photovoice methodology, as a photoethnographic approach, was decided upon as the primary opportunity for youth engagement and data collection during the project's first phase. As such, the mtvU Fulbright photovoice project was implemented in two schools with which the dance4life program was already in partnership. The author, along with the dance4life staff, adapted the photovoice method to incorporate the use of video; therefore, photovoice and videovoice were the primary methods of data collection to learn about youth issues throughout the early stages of this project. Aside from the incorporation of video, the photovoice method was implemented as described in earlier sections of the chapter. An overview is provided in Figure 28.2 to emphasize the main steps. Each of the steps involved a high level of engagement. The recruitment stage, for instance, required much time and effort in order to construct parental consent and youth assent forms that were culturally and contextually appropriate not only by community standards but also by the policies and practices of the secondary schools.

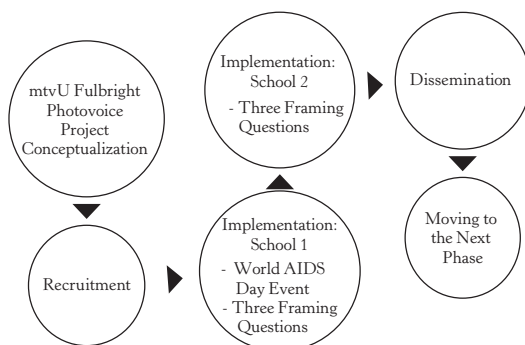


FIGURE 28.2: Overview of Phase 1, Step 2 of a photoethnographic community-based research project.

Phase 1, Step 3: Understanding the Data and Refining the Purpose

As the exploration of youth issues and sexual health in Barbados through photovoice and videovoice began, several themes emerged and were continuously discussed with dance4life staff. Given their urgency within and beyond the secondary school walls (i.e., in the general public) at the time, three were chosen as the primary focus for the remainder of the project. These three themes included general policy concerns (e.g., age of sexual consent versus age of majority), violence, and discrimination. The three photos in Figures 28.3, 28.4, and 28.5 (with the accompanying youth narratives) illustrate these three themes. Embedding the participant-generated videos was not possible for this handbook. However, the use of video creation provided an additional powerful and unique aspect to this research process. Future integration of video into the photovoice methodology should continue to be explored.

These three themes emerged consistently throughout the project but soon began contributing to the much larger issue of gender-based violence. The broader concern was that young people believed that their sexual health, to some extent, was not in their control, be it due to gender-based violence, policy issues that facilitated vulnerability, or the effect of discrimination on a person's ability to pursue positive sexual health. None of the photos or videos directly addressed gender-based violence; rather, the topic emerged naturally throughout the group dialogue process. This element of the photovoice method offers a unique insight into the shared experience among group members and, from the author's perspective, is where the power of this method lies. As participants began to speak about this issue, others in the group felt more comfortable in sharing their perspective as well. It was becoming clear that the issue of sexual health was very tightly connected to gender-based violence in Barbados.

Phase 2: Expanding the Methods

This qualitative, CBPR project laid the groundwork for the next phase of this multiphase study. Given the emergence of the themes of policy concerns, violence, and discrimination, and the emergence of gender-based violence in the data specifically, it became clear that in order to understand sexual health in Barbados, the issue of gender-based



FIGURE 28.3: Photograph and narrative from participant:

"This photograph is meant to depict a holding of hands. In my opinion, an AIDS-free generation can be achieved by everyone simply being more united and careful with what they do. Also, unity amongst everyone (as the photo depicts) would help to achieve an AIDS-free generation because people would be more willing to cooperate. They would be more willing to be protected when engaging in sexual activity, and they would be more willing to get tested for HIV. One solution could be an amendment to the law in Barbados because sexual activity is legal for those of sixteen years of age or older, but one must be at least eighteen years of age to buy a condom. This probably promotes unprotected sex and increases the spread of STIs (including HIV) and should be fixed. I chose this photo because it is simple, yet it portrays exactly what I want it to. This photo symbolizes the strength, unity and trust that we all must have in order to achieve an AIDS-free generation. Also, when an AIDS-free generation is achieved, this sort of unity and trust will be present; this is what it will look like. This relates to my life because unity and an AIDS-free generation would benefit everyone, including me or my relatives."

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violence needed to become a central component. A mixed methods design was explored to bring the project into the next stage. Before outlining the next phase, revisiting the literature and refining the research questions is necessary.

Revisiting the Literature

As the United Nations Population Fund (2008b, para. 1) noted, gender-based violence (GBV) "encompasses a wide range of human rights



FIGURE 28.4: Photograph and narrative from participant:

"This picture depicts a conflict between two teenagers. This is an example of the lack of a loving environment. The lack of a loving environment is the issue that I have chosen to address in my picture. The lack of a loving environment, it being amongst your peers or your home and family life, can impact one's outlook and attitude towards life. Without love from others, we may act out in many ways such as violence, bullying and depression, just to mention a few. This relates to my life because I myself have found a loving environment amongst my peers and family. This has given me a positive outlook on life and everyday situations. A loving environment helps spread love and peace and prevent hatred and war."

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violations, including sexual abuse of children, rape, domestic violence, sexual assault and harassment, trafficking of women and girls and several harmful traditional practices." There is no one unified experience of GBV (Sokoloff & DuPont, 2005); as such, race, age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and many other individual-level factors interact with the experience of GBV and translate into differing impacts of GBV as well (Sokoloff & DuPont, 2005).

Across the globe, "35% of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence" (World Health Organization, 2013a, p.2). As the World Health Organization (2013a, p. 2) reported, among the consequences of such violence is that "in some regions, women are 1.5 times more likely to acquire HIV, as compared to women who have not experienced partner violence."

Women are disproportionately impacted by HIV/AIDS, as well as by GBV (Heise, Ellsberg,



FIGURE 28.5: Photograph and narrative from participant:

"HIV/AIDS has brought about a lot of discrimination from HIV-negative people towards HIV-positive people. Discrimination to the point that some HIV-positive people can't find partners or jobs. This obviously results in the HIV-positive person keeping their status a secret and living as though they didn't have the disease. In an HIV-free environment people won't have to hide behind secrets. Everyone would be HIV negative and would therefore not have to lie about their status. This photo that I took represents a young person, someone in the new generation, coming out of hiding because the discrimination towards people with HIV has passed and she can live freely."

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& Gottmoeller, 2002; Maman, Campbell, Sweat, & Gielen, 2000; UNAIDS, 2012, 2013). GBV creates increased risk for an individual to be exposed to STIs (Maman et al., 2000; UNAIDS, 2012, 2013), and it tends to present as a recurring cycle in the lives of many individuals (Black et al., 2011; Wood, Maforah, & Jewkes, 1998). Living with an STI (specifically HIV) creates increased risk for an individual to be exposed to GBV (UNAIDS, 2013), and living with an STI makes an individual more susceptible to transmitting further STIs (UNAIDS, 2012, 2013).

Refining the Research Questions

This next phase sought to address the following questions: (a) To what extent are gender-based violence and sexual health connected in Barbados? (b) How are individuals nested or embedded within groups that make them more or less vulnerable to gender-based violence? (c) How are

individuals nested or embedded within groups that make them more or less vulnerable to poor sexual health outcomes?

Phase 2, Step 1: Quantitative Survey Methods

Quantitative survey methods will be used in the first step for this research phase. Measures from the World Health Organization (2010) will be adapted to fit the cultural context of the sample and, in addition to demographic information, will explore participants' engagement in transactional sex, their identification with a sexual orientation group, self-report data related to STIs, and their experience of gender-based violence. To assess participants' composite score of sexual health, a section of the survey will include sexual health behaviors, practices, knowledge, and attitudes. As a large sample size is desired, this step will be administered across all the parishes in Barbados. This quantitative aspect of the study should offer insight into the issues of sexual health and gender-based violence that were inaccessible through the previous fieldwork and photovoice efforts. This method intends to understand the extent to which sexual health and gender-based violence are of concern across the island and whether these issues are uniquely affecting specific communities within Barbadian society. From a broader perspective, this data collection effort intends to illustrate the extent to which these issues are concerns in the larger population.

Therefore, a preliminary analysis of the data will be conducted once the final sample size is reached. If a particular group emerges as uniquely or significantly impacted by gender-based violence and poor sexual health outcomes, a second stage of data collection will occur. Such communities, for instance, may include the sex worker community or sexual minority communities. When a better understanding of the community impact of sexual health and gender-based violence is reached, the next step will begin.

Phase 2, Step 2: Photoethnography

To better understand the unique impacts that these issues have on communities, after the quantitative phase the author will return to another stage of photoethnography. Much in the same way as photovoice was implemented in the first phase, a second photovoice process will be pursued. Returning to this method, and guided by the preliminary

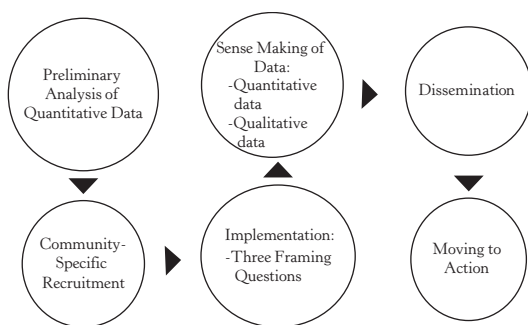


FIGURE 28.6: Overview of Phase 2, Step 2 of a photo-ethnographic community-based research project.

findings of the quantitative data, this step should yield a more refined understanding of the experience of gender-based violence and sexual health among subpopulations in Barbados. Figure 28.6 presents this phase.

Phase 2, Step 3: Performance Ethnography and App Development

With the significant amount of data produced from the early phases of the project, as well as the quantitative (survey) data and qualitative (photo-voice) data, one of the final stages of the project will embrace a performance ethnographic approach. Through the partnership of the author/researcher, a screenwriter, members from the study samples, and representatives across the various partnership organizations, a screenplay will be produced that is thematically representative of the data collected since the onset of the mtvU Fulbright project in 2012 (Denzin, 2003). This step of the multiphase project intends to perform the data in a way that is culturally appropriate and accessible and allows for widespread dissemination of the project findings. Performance ethnography differs from traditional ethnography in that it “represents and performs rituals from everyday life, using performing as a method of representation and a method of understanding” (Denzin, 2003, p. 33). All pieces of data will be incorporated (photo, video, narrative, and survey data) and will embrace the truly mixed methods design of the current project.

In addition, a Web-based application is being developed to better meet the needs and capacities of the community members participating. This app will expand the opportunity for community members to participate in the data collection phases and may allow for a nuanced understanding of the social

issues explored, as it offers a more familiar type of communicating for some community members and may even provide an increased sense of safety around sharing information related to such sensitive topics.

CONCLUSION

Community-based research would benefit from the further integration of multilevel theory and mixed methods designs into applications and interventions. Understanding group-level effects is particularly important given the salience of ecological systems theory in such research (Linney, 2000). Integrating empowerment-based and community-based participatory research approaches further strengthens the potential of multilevel theory, and, when coupled with multiphase research processes that allow for further exploration of group-level findings, a more rigorous, yet still context-rich, understanding and appreciation of intersectionality and human ecology may emerge.

Implementing a mixed methods design requires time and flexibility on the part of researchers, coinvestigators (e.g., partnering agencies/organizations, nongovernmental organizations), and participants. Specifically, when conducting research internationally or in a context/setting that is not considered to be the first home of the primary researcher, particular effort must be put forth in the design stages. A mixed methods design may offer researchers an opportunity to better understand the social issues of interest. Furthermore, a one-shot, single-method attempt to understand an issue as large as sexual health in a given community may even be considered unethical when the primary researcher is considered a foreigner. A more comprehensive, mixed methods approach appears warranted in such situations, with the outcome potentially offering significantly stronger implications for social change and ethical, international community psychology practice.

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