



Research in Action: Setting the standard for GBV research

Gender-based violence (GBV) takes place around the world, but survivors in LMICs often face specific problems, as a result of inadequate state responses to this violence, and because of cultural or religious norms that blame survivors for experiencing this violence, leading to their stigmatisation or even rejection. Therefore, GBV has severe physical, emotional, social, and economic effects.

Research is crucial to better understand the causes and consequences of GBV, as well as the experiences of those who have faced it. Such understanding is vital for designing appropriate actions and policies. But researching GBV is not without risks. Participating in research can cause the re-victimisation of survivors through the recall of painful events and it can put survivors at risk, if the perpetrators of violence are still close to them.

These problems are especially present when research is undertaken in LMICs by researchers from the Global North, as this creates power inequalities between researchers and participants and can lead to incomplete understandings of participants' local contexts and challenges.

The Ensure No 'Grab and Go' Extractive Research (ENGAGE) project sought to address some of these problems by providing a consistent and ethical framework for future research in this field. The project, a collaboration between a UK research team affiliated to the University of Birmingham and practitioners working on gender issues and supporting survivors of gender-based violence in Guatemala (Impunity Watch), Kenya (Wangu Kanja Foundation), and Uganda (ADOVIC), was funded through the IGI-IAS and the Global Challenges Research Fund.

Through the team's experience of undertaking such research including projects that used participatory and creative research approaches, and through in-depth workshops with global partners, they developed a set of guidelines that will contribute to the setting of a global standard for research engagement with survivors of GBV in LMICs.

The guidelines are divided into three different parts; the ENGAGE principles (which identify the core elements to adhere to in such research), a framework for a survivor-centred approach, and recommendations for core elements to include in a research plan.

These each put the core values of openness and transparency, truly collaborative and equal partnerships, and participant safety and wellbeing, at the heart of the research process.

Together, by understanding the context of each project (from local political, historical and social contexts to individual contexts) and promoting the ethical co-design of research goals, the guidelines will help to prevent GBV research from becoming an extractive or exploitative experience for those involved in it.