

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

What Does a Decolonizing/Decentralizing Methodology in Examining Sexual Lives Entail?

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Abstract

This paper is based on an international study, *HIV Prevention for Rural Youth (HP4RY) 2008-2012*, designed to examine the state of, and teach about, sexual health and HIV/AIDS in Edo State, Nigeria. The paper focuses on the mixed methods used in this study, paying attention to the meaning of collaboration and participation in research in a cross-continental setting. Additionally, the paper considers the complexities of engaging in decolonizing and respectful methodological approaches in these settings. Drawing on specifics from the mixed methods and details from the relevant literature, this paper demonstrates the continued need for cross-continental decolonization and decentralized engagements, specifically when dealing with sensitive topics like sexuality and HIV/AIDS (*Afr J Reprod Health 2012 (Special Edition); 16[2]: 55-70*).

Résumé

Cet article est basé sur une étude internationale, *Prévention du VIH au bénéfice de la jeunesse rurale 2008-2012*, conçue pour examiner la nature de l'enseignement à propos de la santé sexuelle et le VIH/SIDA dans l'état d'Edo, Nigéria. L'article met l'accent sur les méthodes mixtes dont on se sert dans cette étude, toute en prêtant attention au sens de la collaboration et la participation à la recherche dans un cadre transcontinental. De plus, l'article étudie les complexités provenant des approches méthodologiques décolonisantes et respectueuses dans ces cadres. Se fondant sur des cas précis à partir des méthodes mixtes et des détails des documents pertinents, cet article illustre le besoin continu d'une décolonisation transcontinentale et des engagements décentralisés, plus particulièrement quand on traite des sujets sensibles telle la sexualité et le VIH/SIDA (*Afr J Reprod Health 2012 (Special Edition); 16[2]: 55-70*).

Keywords: Mixed-Methodology, Decolonization, Nigeria, Sexual Health, HIV/AIDS

Introduction

To state that research in the social sciences has evolved from traditional to include collaborative, action-oriented, and participatory methods, to name just a few, is to state the obvious. In fact, there are vast amounts of literature illustrating how research has moved not just from its western traditional paradigms but has also shifted players from the mainstream to the margins¹. Other studies show how methodologies have undergone processes of 'decolonization'² and how, in order for collaborative critical research to be respectful,

it has to first address, through research ethics boards, the official ethical gaze designed to ensure courteous inquiry³.

Appropriate methods for engaging in research beyond the mainstream or those based on decolonized respectful methodologies are grounded in political awareness for change and in recognizing that knowledge production lies beyond formal institutions and research experts⁴. This recognition has two implications: first, choosing a research method becomes an active, political choice; and, second, the production of knowledge through research involves those people

who have been traditionally excluded as producers and consumers of research. Like most educational undertakings, research is as much about knowledge production as it is about voice. It requires critical partnerships from those who have been trained as researchers and possess the formalized methodological know-how, to policy makers such as state ministries, to stakeholders in the communities of research focus.

Cross-continental research undertakings are about engaging in all the above-mentioned processes; that is, decentralized, decolonized and respectful types of research engagements. These engagements become more important when the research involves collaboration between academic institutions and community organizations and when funding is situated from a resource-rich to a resource-scarce country. Collaborations that bring together such multitudes of partners are, on the one hand, power and conflict-laden as well as loaded with sociopolitical complexities and ambiguities; and, on the other hand, they present a multitude of opportunities for cross-continental teaching and learning and novel understandings of, for example, the enactment of global economies and communication, and information networks.

This paper is based on an international study, *HIV Prevention for Rural Youth (HP4RY) 2008-2012*, designed to examine the state of, and teach about, sexual health and HIV/AIDS in Edo State, Nigeria⁵. The paper focuses on the methods used in this study, paying attention to the meaning of collaboration and participation in research. That is, the paper presents a critical analysis of what it means to engage in cross-continental (in this case, Africa and North America), multifaceted research in a period that is characterized by global health economies (encumbered with power and wealth), information networks, and other machineries that make the 'global village' function. We begin the paper by describing the project's overall multi methodological approach and we continue to explore each method by outlining related triumphs and challenges. We offer a critical analysis of what we interpret to be the challenges of engaging in global exchanges; in other words, we look at the challenges of doing cross-continental research that takes seriously local knowledge and resources (e.g people, structures, etc.), while keeping a cautious eye on what the global has to offer and ensuring that it does not yield to colonizing and mainstream tendencies. The paper asks questions of how it is

possible to engage in sexual health and HIV/AIDS research that does not patronize, but rather gives credit to local initiatives and supports and develops localized-global networks to create healthy, knowledgeable AIDS competent communities.

HIV/AIDS research in the sub-Saharan has significantly increased over the past two decades. Our study builds on some of this research and uses its findings to analyze and understand some of what HP4RY was encountering both in the field and with the data. For instance, we build on studies that inform on the complexity of respondents' interpretation of survey data⁶, and on the effects of questionnaire translation on demographic data⁷. We use these studies to address data collection challenges we encountered in HP4RY. We also build on HIV/AIDS-based literature that discusses the challenges of using ethnography and focus groups to examine sensitive topics requiring disclosure of sexual behaviour. These study argue that this methodological approach, if handled carefully, can reveal conflicts and contradictions between personal and public, and between normative beliefs and individuals' departures from the norm.

This is a methodology-focused paper; however, to illustrate some of the methodological processes, and the complexities arising from the coming together of language and culture in the production of knowledge, some of the research questions and findings will be discussed. These will be used to illustrate points of convergence and divergence between researchers and partners as knowing subjects, as well as between partners and the participants subjected to the study of sexual health and HIV/AIDS. Finally, while the project had several components that could be described as programs, this paper aims to unpack only those processes that are limited to research data collection and analysis.

Methods

Overall

HP4RY was designed with an overall goal to develop and use research evidence to build and evaluate HIV/AIDS prevention for youth delivered through Junior Secondary Schools and communities in rural Edo State, Nigeria. The

overall project sample included three schools selected from each of 10 local government areas (LGA) that represent the diversity of ethnic groups and geographical locations in Edo State (totaling 30 schools). Recognizing that more often than not, in many developing countries, resources are concentrated in urban sectors, HP4RY worked exclusively with rural schools and communities. To be eligible for participation in the project, Junior Secondary Schools had to be located in communities of 20,000 or fewer population, accessible by car, have at least one government teacher teaching a carrier subject for the Family Life and HIV Education (FLHE) program (English, Integrated Science or Social Studies), not have already participated in FLHE training or any other HIV prevention initiative. The most difficult criterion to satisfy was the requirement for a government teacher because it became evident that many schools were poorly staffed and staffed primarily by community teachers (i.e. teachers provided and paid for by the community or the Local Government Area and not by the Ministry of Education). Ninety-seven schools and communities were visited in order to establish a sample of 30. Research staff visited each school and its community to deliver a letter from the Edo State Commissioner of Education endorsing the project, explaining the project to principals, teachers, and community members and obtaining their agreement to participate. Of the selected schools, one in each LGA was randomly assigned to each of two early and one delayed intervention arm. The first early intervention arm included 10 schools whose teachers received inservice training in delivery of the Family Life and HIV Education (FLHE) program in July-August, 2008 and peer educators in December 2009-January 2010, and will be referred to hereafter as the FLHE intervention arm. In the second early intervention arm, 10 schools also received the training in FLHE during these time periods. In addition, the communities of the schools in the second arm received Youth Corps members trained in mobilizing communities using the AIDS Competent Community model^{8 9 10} towards reducing vulnerability to HIV among youth. This second early intervention arm will be referred to as the FLHE+C intervention arm. The 10 schools in

the delayed intervention arm received training in July-August, 2011, and will be referred to as the delayed intervention arm.

The research included three waves of data collection in Junior Secondary Schools (JSS1 – JSS3) as well as formal data collection in the communities that eventually received the Youth Corps members at waves 1 and 3. Junior Secondary Schools include forms 1, 2 and 3, which are roughly equivalent to grades 7, 8 and 9 in the North American system; however, there is an age qualifier to this parallel. In North America, students who are within the same age group usually travel together across grade levels; however, in most rural areas in the sub Sahara, the age of the children in each grade level is often diverse. This is because the time for when a child begins school is mediated by family conditions; also, some children's schooling is often interrupted by season-based activities such as farming, and sometimes, by livestock rearing or by the absence of funds to pay for school fees and/or expenses. The first wave of data collection was completed in all schools in early February 2009 and in communities in the FLHE+C intervention arm in March 2009; the second wave of data was completed in all schools in March 2010; and, the third wave of data collection was completed in all schools in March 2011 and in communities in the FLHE+C intervention arm in July 2011.

The first wave of data collection was designed to gather information about knowledge, perceptions and experiences relevant to teaching about or dealing with sexual health and HIV/AIDS related matters. The second and third waves of data collection occurred after the implementation of an action component in schools and communities of the two intervention arms, that is, after the teachers had received formal training on sexual health and HIV/AIDS modules, and had subsequently begun to teach about sexual health and HIV/AIDS and after Youth Corps members had begun community mobilization. These latter two waves of the study aimed to get a sense of the effectiveness of the training, as well as determine whether or not there were changes in beliefs and perspectives about sexuality and HIV/AIDS among teachers and students and in the sexual experiences or behaviours of students following

the implementation of the Family Life and HIV Education in schools and the community-based program. The Family Life and HIV Education (FLHE) program aims at delivering sexual health education, and teaching about other health issues and diseases affecting families, through infusion in the school curriculum. In Nigeria, the infusion of HIV/AIDS content into the FLHE curriculum was originally conceived, funded and developed by Action Health Incorporated in Lagos. In 2003, the Federal Ministry of Education approved it for nationwide implementation. In part, HP4RY aimed to work with the Edo State Ministry of Education to make real the delivery of this program in the 30 participating schools through enhancing the training of teachers and overseeing their first implementation initiatives. The third wave also provided impact evaluation data covering 1.5 years of program implementation. The results from the first wave were used to create enhancements to the FLHE program, teacher training, and community programming, insuring that their content addressed locally relevant issues and vulnerabilities. Second, these results became the baseline against which results from later waves were to be compared.

HP4RY was designed as an action-oriented mixed method program of study. We refer to HP4RY, as a program of study because part of what it intended to do was to implement the FLHE

program in schools, mobilize communities into action, and thereafter, examine associated effects. Examining both preceding and post program implementation knowledge and practices utilized mixed methods of study. Known for its methodological multiplicity, which is sometimes accredited for study sophistication; a mixed method is that “class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study. ...its logic of inquiry includes the use of induction (or discovery of patterns), deduction (testing of theories and hypotheses), and abduction (uncovering and relying on the best of a set of explanations for understanding one’s results)”¹¹. HP4PY involved three methodological components: surveys, individual and focus group interviews, and community ethnographies (Table 1).

Surveys were designed to numerically measure students’ and teachers’ knowledge and attitudes related to sexual health and HIV/AIDS, teachers’ attitudes and experiences related to teaching about these topics, and students’ sexual experiences. In the second and third wave of data collection, surveys also gathered information about the delivery of the school-based program-

Table 1: Data collection processes parenthesis/brackets

	Waves 1 data collection		Training for Program Delivery		Waves 2 data collection	Training for Program Delivery	Waves 3 data collection		Training for Program Delivery
Research Arm	Oct '08- Feb '09	Feb - Mar '09	Aug '09	Dec-'09 -Jan-'10	Feb- Mar'10	Mar'10 & Aug'10	Feb- Mar'11	June- Jul'11	“Aug' 11
FLHE	A		Teacher	PE	A		A		
FLHE+C	A	B	Teachers, NYSC	PE	A	NYSC	A	C	
DELAYED	A				A		A		Teachers & PE

- A. Surveys, student focus groups and teacher interviews
- B. Brief ethnographies
- C. Surveys with Youth Corps and Community leaders and youth.
- PE. Peer Education

ming and provided data for a formal impact evaluation. As well, during the second and third waves of data collection, the presence of Youth Corps in the communities of schools in the FLHE+C intervention arm, added activity to community life.

Individual interviews with teachers and focus groups with students were conducted at the same time as surveys, but in a smaller number of schools. In the first wave of data collection interviews were designed to get understandings of teachers' perspectives and beliefs about teaching about sexuality and HIV/AIDS and students' knowledge and beliefs about sexual health, sexual behaviours, and HIV/AIDS. In the second and third waves they also gathered information on program delivery and challenges.

The second qualitative design was ethnographic and involved field notes, observations, and interviews with community members. Historically originating in the field of anthropology and in colonial practices of studying "primitive cultures", ethnography is primarily used to access the interpretation of the world of the research subjects¹². It is that class of research closely associated with the descriptive study of a human society, based on data obtained primarily from field work. Ethnography research assistants (ERAs) who were university-trained indigenes to the communities conducted the community ethnographies. Following the ethnography, Nigerian Youth Corps members, engaged in community mobilization to enhance AIDS competency through living in, observing, learning about and acting on communities' beliefs, knowledge and practices. (In Nigeria, upon completion of their education, youth are required to do 12 months of national service in a place other than their home province. They are called National Youth Service members).¹³ engaged in community-mobilization to enhance AIDS competency^{8,9,10} through "living in", observing, learning about, and acting on communities' beliefs, knowledge, and practices. Each of the methods followed the research ethics stipulations as outlined in the Canadian Tri-Council regulations for Ethical Conduct of Research and were also reviewed for ethical clearance by the University of Benin and the Edo State Ministry of

Education. The following sections discuss fully these designs beginning by outlining why they were chosen, and proceeding to offer the strengths and challenges of each.

The survey procedures

In the survey methodology, HP4RY was interested in getting statistical data from students and teachers on knowledge, beliefs and attitudes about HIV/AIDS, teaching about these, and for students on sexual experiences that could place them at risk for, or protect them against HIV transmission. Over the three waves of data collection, spanning three years, the survey continued to measure these areas in order to produce a profile of whether any changes had occurred that could be related to the presence of either the school- or school-and-community-based programming. This impact evaluation was done by comparing changes in teacher and student responses to questions between schools in the delayed-intervention (no program until after final data collection), the FLHE intervention (school program only), and the FLHE+C intervention (school and community program) research arms¹⁴.

Recognizing the importance of survey questions that validly capture the desired information and the influence of cultural meanings and interpretations on responses to questions, the surveys used questions that had been developed, tested, and used in other research projects in countries of the sub-Sahara^{15 16 17 18 19}. Research team members and staff reviewed draft survey questions. Project staff all had prior experience in conducting surveys in rural communities in Edo State and contributed to refinement of survey items based on this experience. Because of the multiplicity of indigenous languages in Edo State and the use of Pidgin English (all of which youth are unlikely to have encountered in written form) Nigerian team members and staff advised that surveys should be printed in standard English but read by a survey team member in both standard English and several forms of Pidgin English to maximize student comprehension. Project staff had used this procedure in former fieldwork and viewed it as feasible and successful. Before being finalized, the survey was pilot-tested in one school

with responses checked for consistency and coherence.

SNAP software was used to produce the surveys in a scan-able form. This by-passed the need for data entry 'by hand' since survey data was captured using a high speed scanner that converted responses into an electronic database, which was then taken through a data-checking procedure to locate and modify erroneous responses.

Ten research assistants and four staff members participated in a weeklong training program prior to each wave of data collection. Training covered topics of sexuality and HIV/AIDS and helped build comfort in talking about these topics. As well, survey administration, data capturing, the production of student ID cards, and the logistics of the process involved in each school were part of the training. Following the training, three teams consisting of 3 research assistants and 1 staff member (2 males and 2 females each) administered the surveys in schools and one team of two conducted data capturing using the scanning technology. In addition, the project coordinator visited each school 2-5 days prior to the arrival of the research team to confirm the date and procedures for data collection, review consent procedures and survey instruments with the school principal, and collect basic information about the school (e.g number of students, faculty, facilities). In most schools, two days were required to complete survey data collection. On the first day, all students were issued identification cards that included their picture, name, school name and a unique number. This required photographing each student and printing and laminating the cards. Students retained these cards and recorded only their identification number on surveys at each wave of data collection. This made it possible to track those students who were at the school over several waves of data collection and trace changes in their responses. At the second wave of data collection, only students who were not present at the first wave, or who had lost their cards, were issued identification cards. At the third wave of data collection, no new cards were issued, but students who had lost their cards had their numbers located on master files and were provided with their numbers for recording on surveys. The

function of ID cards was to link data from students who participated in more than one wave of data collection. Since wave 3 was the final wave of data collection, there was no reason to issue new cards.

Devoted to data collection, the second day began with the division of students according to gender and, in larger schools they were also grouped by grade. This grouping was then followed by the students' completion of the survey in their designated rooms with female data collection team members working with female students, and males with males. Each student was given a copy of the survey and a pen and students were asked to follow the survey questions as one team member read them aloud. A team member read questions aloud in Standard English and repeated the question in Pidgin English. If students did not understand, the question was read again and a different mode of stating it in Pidgin was used. The second team member walked around the classroom and signaled if he or she saw students were having difficulties completing the survey so that the team member reading the questions could slow down or repeat what they had said. Walking around the classroom also discouraged copying of responses among students. Individually and privately, teachers also completed their survey on this day and returned them to the team leader in a sealed envelope.

At the end of each day in the field, the survey teams met to debrief; that is, they reviewed challenges and successes of the day, discussed commentary from students and teachers as well as problems with survey comprehension and/or procedures that arose; in addition, they brainstormed solutions to problems. Notes were taken on debriefing, which later assisted researchers to understand anomalies or inconsistencies in data. In reviewing these notes it was apparent that teamwork was strong, skills were built to identify and resolve most problems that arose and that survey team members were aware of and sensitive to the challenges that respondents faced in completing the surveys; therefore they developed strategies for maximizing comprehension, which contributed to the reliability and validity of results. Table 2 presents a summary of survey samples by wave of data

collection. The increase in students in waves 2 and 3 may be due to educational reforms by the new governor of Edo State, including a waiver of fees, provision of infrastructure, and re-posting of teachers to rural schools. The fluctuation in the number of teachers between waves is based on the number of teachers present in schools on the data collection days. Schools ranged in size from 45 to 340 students and their student/teacher ratios ranged from 11 to 102. One school had only boys and the remaining schools were coeducational.

Table 2: Survey Samples by Wave of Data Collection

Survey Samples	Number of Teachers	Number of Students
Wave 1	88	4424
Wave 2	79	4983
Wave 3	94	5201
TOTALS	261	14,608

The full results for teachers are presented in Dlamini et al. in this volume²⁰ and for students in Arnold et al. in this volume¹⁴. A general look at the survey results indicates positive growth in teachers' comfort and self-acclaimed ability and willingness to deliver the FLHE program and in learners' knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and related sexual behaviour. It is important to note; however, that gains among students were not homogeneous that is, they diverged depending on sex and grade levels¹⁴. In some instances, students and teachers did not agree. For example, while teachers consistently reported increases in teaching about sexuality and HIV/AIDS both in classroom subjects and in co- and extra-curricular activities students only reported significant increases in learning from teachers' about HIV/AIDS in certain schools most of which had Corps.

Challenges of survey research

While survey data were collected from a sizable number of students, this was not without methodological challenges. The first set of challenges that affected survey (and interview) data collection was environmental. The school infrastructure is weak, with insufficient desks or chairs for students in most schools and some

schools even lacking roofs to keep out the rain and reduce the heat or windows and doors to provide privacy. This affected data collection with chairs and desks borrowed from the nearby Senior Secondary School when possible or students completing surveys or participating in focus group discussions while seated on the ground. This made survey completion an uncomfortable process in several schools. The technological infrastructure to support research is also weak in Edo State. Electricity to power or recharge audio recorders, computers, scanners, printers, etc. and phone and Internet connectivity for communication is erratic and expensive; electricity is completely shut down at night, leaving equipment exposed to high temperatures and humidity. Computers used in transcribing and analyzing qualitative data and in capturing and analyzing survey data malfunctioned because of the heat and humidity and always had to be connected to surge protectors. These affected communication between office and field, between researchers and staff, between office and participating schools and communities, and the pace of data processing and analysis.

The second set of challenges affecting questionnaire respondents was language and culture. The standard approach to translating survey instruments (forward-backward translation with verification of consistency) was not possible because of the large number of indigenous languages and the lack of contact with these or with lingua franca, Pidgin English in written form. The method of facilitators reading questions aloud both as printed and in one or more translations to Pidgin English, together with students raising their hands if questions were unclear, was not entirely successful at preventing difficulties. This was evidenced in responses to several questions that signaled the probability that students failed to comprehend. For example, a student whose response to the question, "have you ever been involved in sexual intercourse?" was a "no", would be expected to respond with another "no" to the question, "have you ever been pregnant?" Instead, some students responded yes to the latter and similar questions.

In the second wave of data collection, efforts were made to standardize the ways that survey facilitators responded to students' questions.

Interestingly, standardization may have limited or undermined the use of local interpretation of students' questions based on the facilitators' cultural knowledge. In fact, survey results indicated that this move was counter-productive in that it resulted in much higher rates of inconsistency in responses in wave 2 than wave 1; consequently we returned to the approach of wave 1 that empowered survey facilitators to explain based on the local questions, language, and age of students. Regardless of these efforts, analyses indicate that on certain questions between 25-60% of students provided inconsistent responses to survey questions. It was curious that the highest rates of inconsistency (40-60%) were for questions of age, religion, and ethnicity, while those on sexual behaviors and condom use were between 5 and 30% (lowest in waves 1 and 3, highest in wave 2). The high level of inconsistency in some questions resulted in use of more elaborate methods of data checking and verification than are usually used in survey research. Triangulation with qualitative results and with field reports from Youth Corps members and staff also helped clarify inconsistencies in survey responses. Ultimately, some questions (e.g. ethnicity) were dropped from the database because of the very high level of inconsistency and others had categories collapsed to enhance reliability (e.g. religion and age). For questions on sexuality, rates of inconsistency in waves 1 and 3 were the same or lower than those found in comparable research^{21 22 23 24 25 26}, so no adjustments were required to these data.

School interviews and focus groups

HP4RY utilized qualitative research methodologies that included individual in-depth interviews with teachers, and focus group discussions with students to tease out student and teacher knowledge, experiences, and beliefs about HIV/AIDS. Additionally, together with the State Ministry of Education, HP4RY implemented the FLHE program (described above); therefore, part of the exploration was to garner information about the effects of the program-action component of the study. This action component involved teacher delivery of FLHE curriculum in schools and community mobilization by trained Corps.

Teachers were trained by master trainers, who had received training from the Ministry of Education, which was followed by a refresher course done by the Ministry together with research team members. Similar to the training of the master trainers, the objectives of the teacher-training course were to increase the knowledge, awareness, and skills of carrier subject teachers in the concepts, content and methodology for classroom delivery of the FLHE curriculum in schools.

Prior to beginning the interviews, five research assistants (RA) received training from members of the staff and research team on conducting interviews and focus group forums. Training included content information about sexuality and HIV/AIDS and ways to talk about this information, general instruction in qualitative interviewing techniques, sessions designed to sensitize research assistants to issues specific to interviewing about sexual health and HIV/AIDS, practice using interview guides, and setting up mock interview scenarios to assess the suitability of the trained RA interviewer.

At each data collection wave, student and teacher qualitative data were collected from 10 schools with two sex-based focus groups of male and female students in JSS1 and JSS3, totaling four focus groups per school, and 40 focus group interviews overall. One school was selected from each of the 10 Local Government Areas to insure schools representing each of the three research arms were included in the qualitative data collection. As indicated in the literature on sexual health, the gender of the interviewer often impacts the way participants respond to questions²⁷; therefore, in this data collection process we ensured that female participants were grouped together and were interviewed by a female researcher, and the same was true for males. Following the interviews, RAs took time to debrief together and to individually write reflective journals, which was then followed by transcribing. Each RA transcribed his/her interviews, with the exception of one case where the RA secured a full-time job and had to leave without completing his transcripts. In most cases smooth audio recording was challenging, therefore, the interviewer worked with a note taker and both the recording and the notes were used to reconstruct and triangulate the

focus group interview. In wave 2, for example, of the 40 focus group interviews, 32 utilized note takers while 8 did not. For coding and analysis, the transcripts were put together according to schools, and within schools by gender and grade levels. Further, for each school, a summary table was created to give a snapshot of how students in a school addressed the key issues. Drawing from lessons learnt in wave 2, in wave 3 all focus groups were conducted with note takers.

Interviews were also conducted in the same schools with teachers and principals at each wave of data collection. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and then each interview transcript was read for emerging themes. Each transcript was coded using the qualitative software N6 and all transcripts were ordered according to schools, that is, data collected from teachers in the same school were grouped together with student data and analyzed for themes, and points of divergences and of convergences in the identified key question areas.

A general look at school qualitative data indicates positive growth over the 3 waves of data collection¹⁴⁻²⁰ in the ways that students were learning about HIV/AIDS; as well, teachers reported changes in their practices and attitudes towards teaching about the subject following the training. Methodological challenges existed; however, the quality of the data together with the knowledge gathered through this process, largely override the problems. To begin, there existed technical problems during the data collection and analysis stages. These included incongruities with labeling and transcribing, and transfer of data from one site to another. There were also personnel challenges, such as losing trained interviewers to better jobs and interviewers differing in levels of skill-set.

The strength of the qualitative data collection process lay in the team's ability to take ownership of the process, which made problem solving manageable. For instance, adding a notetaker solved technical difficulties regarding inaudible audio recordings caused by ambient noise. The note-taker was also able to record non-verbal emotive interactions, which would not be picked up on a recording. Reflective journal notes, which RAs wrote at the end of each data collection day,

were beneficial to interviewers who could reflect back on how they had performed and also to data analysis since interviewers also noted their observations of the interactions during the interview. A significant achievement of this process was that students and teachers were forthcoming with important and useful information that helped provide depth to our understanding of how FLHE was being implemented in the schools and how students were experiencing some of the challenges of staying safe.

Community engagement: Ethnography snapshots and mobilization for ACC

The most novel part of the project regards community activities undertaken in two parts. The first was the collection of ethnographies by indigenous/local university graduates in each of the 10 communities in the FLHE+C intervention arm of the sample. Ethnographies were conducted to establish the starting point of HP4RY communities on the AIDS Competent Community (ACC) model⁸⁻¹⁰. Information garnered in these ethnographies was used to guide the second activity, which was community mobilization. In this second activity NYSC members engaged in mobilizing initiatives that informed and facilitated approaches towards combating the spread of HIV/AIDS¹³.

Ethnographic activities followed the cultural tradition in which those involved approach community leaders to 'salute' and introduce themselves and request permission to, and support in, conducting research in the community. In HP4RY, community leaders were further part of the process of selecting indigenous university educated, ethnographic research assistant (ERA) from each community. Once the ERAs were selected, they received a weeklong training from HP4RY researchers in the ACC model and in ethnographic methods of data collection (interviewing, focus group, observation and field notes). Before dispensing to the communities, ERAs were given a guide listing information that they were expected to obtain. First was community mapping, where the ERAs gathered information on the physical space of the communities, documenting key infrastructural resources such as

schools, clinics, shopping areas, markets, and other key places where the community tended to congregate. Second, ERAs were to engage in semi-structured interviews in which they would cover topics on community sexual health norms and beliefs and knowledge and practices related to HIV/AIDS and to those who are infected. Third, in everyday observations and conversations with locals, ERAs were expected to talk about and, where appropriate, participate in community social activities (weddings, cultural ceremonies) with the aim to grasp and document (in field journals) general youth practices and behavior.

Ethnographic data collection spanned a period of four months. The notes and sketches (community mapping) were passed on to a professional local geographer who produced maps on each community. Interviews and field notes were transcribed and analyzed by researchers, staff and research assistants. Together the community maps and field notes were used to produce community profiles and summaries, which informed on factors contributing to community vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. As well, these were used to identify intervention entry points as suggested in the ACC model. All ethnographic information was incorporated into the training of Youth Corps members who were recruited as community mobilizing agents, that is, the second aforementioned action activity.

Through negotiations with the State Directorate of the National Youth Service Corps, three overlapping cohorts of Youth Corps members were recruited for employment on HP4RY at the government run month-long orientation sessions. Typically, the National Youth Service Corps is a national requirement expected of all citizens following completion of post secondary studies. Each cohort remained with the project for 11-15 months insuring that at least 2 Corps members, typically 1 female and 1 male, were present in each of the 10 participating communities (totaling 40 Youth Corps members) over the nearly 2 years of mobilization activities. H4PRY Youth Corps members received additional weeklong training from the project team, which focused on youth sexuality, HIV/AIDS, strategies for community mobilization to increase AIDS competence as well as on field recording and

reporting of activities. They were provided with a pay supplement (this is expected since the government allocation is below subsistence), a furnished room in their assigned community and transportation between their assigned community, project headquarters and their home community.

To engage in mobilizing the community, Youth Corps were initially provided with specific guidelines and work plans; however, as they gained experience and confidence, they were supported to develop their own work plans in collaboration with community youth and adults. The work of the Youth Corps was monitored and supported by a Field Coordinator through telephone calls, site visits and information sharing using a newsletter that included success stories, programming advice, response to questions, and suggestions for dealing with challenges. Activities in communities became more diverse and complex as communities advanced towards greater AIDS competency. During the last months of the program, Youth Corps concentrated on insuring the program was supported within the community and on turning it over to a core group of youth in the community.

The project team, through surveys, and interviews with community leaders and other stakeholders, evaluated all community activities. It is safe to state that the oral nature of the community where people easily shared their ideas about community activities made it possible for the project team to also learn about the successes and challenges of the program informally.

Response to and Impact of Community Engagement

Full results of the community program¹³ and the overall impact evaluation¹⁴ are presented elsewhere in this volume. Analysis of the data collected to assess Corps and community response to the program indicate that both found the program enlightening, beneficial and assessed that communities progressed toward greater AIDS Competence. The latter was confirmed through specific activities and initiatives taken up by communities¹³. Analysis of the impact evaluation data further indicates that JSS students in schools located in communities that had the Corps-led

ACC program made greater gains than those in schools without community programming in several areas. This may, in part, be explained by the high level of engagement of Corps not only in their communities, but also in the local schools. Corps logs indicated that school Principals invited and welcomed them into the schools to conduct HIV/AIDS related activities and education, supplementing or at times replacing the work designated for teachers. The evidence from Corps logs and the impact evaluation data suggests that the Corps-led community programming was instrumental in reducing youth vulnerability to negative sexual health outcomes. The ultimate challenge will be to find a way to sustain and expand this work to the rest of the sub-Saharan.

Discussion and Methodological Lessons

Lessons on Translation

The use of surveys to measure knowledge, opinions, and other information in developing countries has been documented as full of challenges^{23 25 26}. Thus, as indicated in the above sections, the experience of HP4RY was no exception. The collection of quantitative data in developing countries often requires the translation of a survey instrument. Weinreb and Sana identify two of the most common modes of survey instrument translation⁷: the officially sanctioned method, which involves the pre-fieldwork production of a standardized translation of the template questionnaire into all or most languages in which surveys are expected to be conducted; and the informal, which happens when there is a mismatch between the language of the questionnaire available to the survey administrator/facilitator and the language in which the actual survey is conducted. They argue that the latter is rarely acknowledged in literature; however, it is pretty common in the field. In a study conducted in Kenya, Weinreb and Sana found that the effects of these non-standardized translations on “univariate statistics—including higher-order variance structures—are rather moderate. The effects become magnified, however, when multivariate analysis is used,

typically attenuating results⁷”.

Methodologically, our study used what Weinreb and Sana term the informal questionnaire translation in both quantitative and qualitative undertakings. There were, however, more issues in the way that we treated language use than a mere case of questionnaire translation. First, because HP4RY involved cross-continental collaboration, researchers from the West were cautious not to engage in mainstream practices in which they would tell those in Nigeria that the questionnaires needed more of a local “tweaking” in order to do what they were intended to do. As a result, what was obvious to these researchers was put in question form, “did local researchers think that the questionnaires needed translations?” In the end, the informal translations that occurred were hardly enough to deal with the realities of the language diversity in the region. For instance, problems arose because there are multiple indigenous languages, many or all of which survey respondents, in our case, pre- and early adolescent children, have never seen in written form. There are 26 languages in Edo State and several of these operated in the communities of research focus. The research team was advised to use Pidgin English since this was the lingua franca of communication between teachers, students and parents and across ethnic groups. However, this too is not a written language and has local variations and eccentricities that could only be spoken by survey facilitators and not written out in the textual version of the survey. In the end, as described above, Standard English was used and survey facilitators were encouraged to respond to questions using their discretion and the language that they felt was most amiable to the respondents.

Lessons on culture-knowledge translation

While some of the inconsistencies in survey responses may be attributed to language difficulties, others may be accredited to divergences between Western and Nigerian cultural practices. In the West, age is understood through calendar-marked birth dates coupled with documentation in the form of a certificate; in Nigeria (and other African countries), age is understood through important life events or

calendar marked dates, or a combination of both. In this regard, it would be presumptuous to think that students did not understand the question, how old are you/what is your age/when were you born? However, there were inconsistent responses to this question such as a student who reported an age of 15 years in wave one reporting an age of 13 years in a later wave of the study – a biological impossibility.

One explanation is that in these rural communities, the understanding of birth dates is culturally informed. Often, births are marked by important events that may happen nationally or regionally. For example, parents may simply tell a child that she was born the year that the first train traveled across Benin City, which would have been an infrastructure-significant event in the community. Upon hearing this information, a teacher would “eye” and assign a year of birth to such event-described students. To “eye” is a local phrase used to describe the way that teachers look at and compare a student to others of similar height and weight and use information to guess his/her age, which consequently results in an estimated birth date. As students grow and become exposed to information technology and other resources, they may investigate and find out the exact year that the train first travelled through the city, consequently changing their ages. While there is no evidence that such scenarios occurred during the study, the example illustrates the workings of culture and other local practices in shaping the ways students responded to a significant number of the demographic questions. Several staff members provided potential explanations of inconsistencies in reports of ethnicity. Children whose extended family (e.g. grandparents, aunts, uncles) includes diverse ethnic groups, and who shift between homes may report their ethnicity based on the household in which they currently reside. A similar explanation may apply to religion if different religions are represented in an extended family. What we found was comparatively high consistency in reporting whether one was Christian or Muslim, but high inconsistency among different forms of Christianity (e.g. Protestant and Catholic, even more so among different Protestant denominations).

In addition to culture, it is further possible that some of the inconsistencies resulted because of issues of trust and social desirability. That is, some of the responses resulted from students’ refusal to admit to things that are socially undesirable (like saying they had engaged in premarital sexual intercourse). With regards to age, it is also possible that respondents thought the researcher needed a certain age of student or that one age would be judged better than another so they gave a different one. All these are plausible explanations, which might have influenced the responses resulting in inconsistencies. Ultimately, through careful data checking and analysis and triangulation with field reports and interview/focus group data we were able to eliminate problematic data and insure that the data used in final analyses had appropriately high levels of reliability and validity.

Lessons on identity negotiation

In HP4RY researcher social identities were central to the methodological processes. Researcher social and academic experiences were part of the data collection and analyzing processes as well as part of the community and school programs and initiatives. Such uses of identity are normative in critical ethnography in which the position of the researcher as an embodied self is considered an important and valuable source^{28 29}. As researchers, we also embraced Suzan Kreger’s assertion that “in social science, although we try to comprehend others, and although we may aim to depict the ways their realities are different from our own, understanding others actually requires us to project a great deal of ourselves onto others and onto the world at large²⁹”. As such, we approached the project acknowledging that our social positions would influence how we worked with others and vice versa.

The HP4RY team was made of Black Nigerian citizens, white Canadians and diaspora Canadians of African descent. All of the Canadian team members who were directly involved with the research and intervention work came to the project with prior experience in similar work in other countries in SSA and some with experience in Nigeria. The three Nigerian academics had

attained graduate degrees in North America but had lived the majority of their lives in Nigeria. Within the group of diaspora Canadians who made up the team were also those who occupied an in-between zone; that is, those of Nigerian descent whose lives are split equally because of the time they spend in Canada and Nigeria. There is plenty of literature that informs of the different readings of these bodies not just in research but also in teaching³⁰; therefore, it was not surprising that similar readings occurred in HP4RY.

In addition to processes of identity formation, the HP4RY team was cognizant of what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o refers to as "decolonizing the mind"³¹. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o asserts that in order to fight existing imperialist traditions, there is need to interrogate and dismantle past legacies in which Africans were intellectually colonized to view western languages such as English and western knowledge and paradigms as the most legitimate. Further to adopting a decolonizing framework, the project team operated within a context that considered the African past as intertwined with the present, and how, to borrow from Mikhail Bakhtin, within its "non-official" cultures³², especially those that have been created in postcolonial era³³ exists systems of domination and subordination. To decolonize one's mind is a life-long process, as well, systems of domination and subordination are not necessarily easy to identify when situated within unofficial cultures, that is, in interpersonal politics (within the negotiation of relation of power by individuals in interaction³⁴). Therefore, part of the lessons for this project had to deal with the sometimes conflicting excursions of decolonizing individual minds, of identifying practices of domination and subordination that threatened to tear the project apart, as well as lessons on how to identify and address those inherent imperialistic tendencies that emerged as the project unfolded.

Adversely, keeping in mind the aforementioned frameworks, because of Nigeria's colonial history, it was not surprising to experience instances where whiteness as an identity marker, was equated with power, knowledge and authority. Further, it was not surprising to experience instances where the diaspora Canadians were positioned as "Native

informants³⁵"; that is, as those people who stand between the Western other and the Third world subject. This positioning was such that these researchers were seen as authentically native, however, they were also seen in relation to their white counterparts as possessing Western informed authority that they exercised to facilitate what was sometimes viewed as unequal transcontinental practices.

Additionally, gender relations manifested in quite significant ways. Because those who occupied the in-between space were women, their authority as knowledgeable indigenous Nigerians was often challenged because of their female status, which in some instances meant that as women, they could not 'represent' the very communities they came from. The combination of the historically informed positioning of whiteness combined with the perspective of the 'gendered' Native Informant resulted in complexities that the HP4RY team had to contend with. For instance, while subgroups of team members held responsibility for different segments of the project (e.g., research in schools, research in communities) and these subgroups had designated leaders, it was not uncommon for information to be sent only to that person upheld as 'leader' because of racial and/or gender positioning, in this way bypassing the 'official' leader. There were also instances where notions of insider-outsider status, which are well documented in qualitative literature³⁶ added to the already difficult historically informed and gendered identifications. Also, the insider-outsider status became ambiguous and played out differently depending on the research scenario. For instance, some behavior and instances in research data collection were not for 'outside' Canadian consumption, consequently, regardless of its critical nature, some of this information remained the privy of Nigerian team members who were positioned as 'insiders'. However, not all instances had this binary Canadian-Nigerian divide; there were instances where it became important for researchers and staff members to safeguard their territories and to withhold information from all sides in order to protect themselves. At times, lines of authority became blurry and terms of collaborative participation were challenged. This

complex and often problematic positioning of individuals detracted from research partners working as a team who combined their diverse expertise. It also resulted in practices where those who felt undermined had to reaffirm their positions as knowledgeable researchers.

Lessons on collaboration

As a collaborative program of research, HP4RY was interested in both content and process; it was about producing useful knowledge. As such, in producing this knowledge, it became important to involve the people who are intimately acquainted with the issues of focus, and in this case, sexual health and HIV/AIDS. In this regard, there were many players that were engaged by HP4RY who possessed local knowledge and could contribute to, for example, as indicated above, the translation of the survey instruments. Positioning locals as knowledgeable actors sometimes resulted in ambiguities because of the failure to explicitly acknowledge when not- knowledgeable, that is, to say 'I don't know'. Consequently, it became ambiguous to decipher what project staff and some research team members knew and were capable of doing from what they did not know. It also became difficult to decipher things that had occurred because of technical difficulties such as a computer crash resulting from overheating, or errors that occurred because of lack of knowledge (such as improper transcribing of data as in wave 1 of qualitative data collection).

Challenges of collaboration also resulted because of the oral and literary cultures. Without drawing either/or dichotomies, although generally a literate culture, the primary modes of operation in many scenarios in Nigeria are through oral mediums (talk, phones, music, etc.). However, the project mode of operation was mainly through writing (email; reports, etc.). This presented challenges at different levels of the project. For instance, activities of community mobilization (ethnographies and Youth Corps activities) were to be "logged" and reported to the field coordinator through field journals and final written reports. Working to build capacity for written field reporting became a challenge and created conflict between the community lead researcher, field

coordinator, and the principal investigators. Such differences in modes of operation challenged the nature of collaboration and skewed the level of participation from all parties when written materials were expected. Collaboration meant that those with expertise in writing had to convert what was oral into the written form, which slanted the amount of work back to those in the global north – resulting yet again in what could be interpreted as another colonizing practice of 'writing for' rather than 'writing with' or even 'writing on behalf of.'

Conclusions

As we move towards the final stages of the project, looking back demands that we again ask carefully those questions of collaboration, decolonizing and respectful research. We look forward with integrity as we see the fruits of the initiative advancing and being carried forward by the local ministries (health, education), and as communities continue with the conversations and initiatives that the HP4RY began. Yet, as we look back on the methodological process and the relationships that emerged because and through it, we are haunted by the difficult questions that we are yet to address. We continue to ask, how do cross-continental study initiatives avoid the traps of past colonizing practices and keep sight of the goals that they seek to undertake? Is it possible to engage in research that does not use centralized or even colonizing methodologies? For instance, is it possible to use those methods that rely on the communication culture of the locals (orality) rather than privileging the centralized, the written culture? What if data were to be collected in ways that locals learn about and change their communities and what would these ways look like? How do Westerners address the economic realities of partners that are instrumental in some of the challenges experienced in collaborations and research initiatives? Do decolonized and de-mainstreamed initiatives truly exist in this economically lean and competitive global economy?

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