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Acknowledging Participants in Research on Activism to End Violence Against Women, in Post Conflict Settings
Research Purpose

- Women’s activism is a key influencer of policy and practice (Htun and Weldon 2012)

- Conceptualise women’s activism in post conflict / divided societies

- Understand the impact of legacy of conflict and division on VAW activism and vice versa
Methodology

- Qualitative, feminist research
- Life history method
- 10 activists in each filed site – Namibia and Northern Ireland
Aims of Today

- To give a flavour of the research and emerging themes
- To motivate the case for rethinking the social science convention of distorting the identify all life history participants - where possible, offer choice
Part 1 - Interesting Themes

- The nature of post conflict division
- The idea of culture as a coloniser of women
- The activism being pursued
“Culture is a neglected pathway to women’s justice.”

Tamale (2008: 55)
Part 2 - Pseudoymity

- Pre interview, participants were asked to select a pseudonym

- Rosa – subjected to extensive public ridicule (Barcia, 2014) and support, as an activist for several decades. Why hide behind another name?
Pseudoymity

- Sarry – supported women to go public about their experiences of violence and abuse. Hiding her identity wouldn’t feel right.

“how can you write about a person who does not exist?”
What to do?
Accepting Their Rationale

- The researcher was already aware of the need to carefully manage Rosa’s data

- Both activists gave compelling reasons

- Remembered the unease, but acceptance, expressed by other participants
Other Research

- I wanted to accommodate participants' wishes so researched to revise an ethical approach.

- Grinyer (2009) – allowed choice because of distress experienced by participants.

- Guenther (2009) – didn’t allow choice based on concern it would harm participants.
Problems with Pseudoymity

- Guenther (2009) concluded women could be recognised even with distorted names having put other research to the test.

- When groups, places are involved, how do you effectively distort?

- Every datum can point to an identification.
Process Consent

- Recommended by Smythe and Miller (2000)

- Check out every datum with every participant and pull content that does not meet with the participant’s consent

- Not possible in this instance due to geography but of interest to researcher
The Outcome

- The Departmental Ethics Committee of the overseeing university approved variation in approach

- 5 out of 20 have chosen to use their own name

- Some Namibian participants need to be contacted
References


Mukungu, Kate (2017) “How can you write about a person who does not exist?”: rethinking pseudonymity and informed consent in life history research. Social Sciences, 6 (3). p. 86.