Using photovoice and action research to assess the ecological factors which impede and promote the health of children in Sierra Leone: A case study

Ashley Walker, Ph.D., CHES
University of Northern Colorado
& Jody Early, Ph.D., CHES
Texas Woman’s University

Statement of the Purpose

- The purpose of this action research study was to identify the current sociological, economic, environmental, political, and cultural factors which impede and promote health among orphans in Sierra Leone as identified by caregivers employed by a non-governmental relief organization.

Presenter Disclosures

- Ashley Walker, Ph.D., CHES
- Jody Oomen-Early, Ph.D., CHES

(1) The following personal financial relationships with commercial interests relevant to this presentation existed during the past 12 months:

- No relationships to disclose
Slide 4

Review of Literature

- Very little empirical research has been conducted to assess the barriers.
- Sierra Leone has high numbers of children orphaned/abandoned by both disease and violence.
- The children of Sierra Leone do not receive support from the government.

Slide 5

Review of Literature

- The importance of NGOs to the children affected by disease and violence has been supported.
- Gaps remain in the literature in regards to the needs and the services provided.

Slide 6

Review of Literature

- A few studies focused on the impact of the Sierra Leonean war on the health of children.
- Action research studies which identify barriers to care & gaps in services are missing from the literature.
**What is Participatory Action Research (PAR)?**

- Focuses on specific research questions with the intention of taking action
- Put the capability of change in the hands of the participants so they can transform their own lives

**Why PAR?**

- Allows those “living with the experiences” the opportunity to become involved
- Overall the researcher seeks to find out what the participant knows versus what he does not know.

**Methodology**

- Protecting Human Participants
  - IRB approval, Informed Consent & Consent to Publish
  - Storage of forms and data
- Sampling
  - 10 caregivers from All As One Center: Freetown, Sierra Leone
Methodology

• Data Collection
  –Photovoice supports the objectives of participatory action research because individuals come together to identify factors contributing to the problem and organize to initiate change

The Goals of Photovoice

• To record and present everyday realities using photography
• To promote critical dialogue and knowledge
• To reach policymakers

Methodology

• Data Collection
  –Travel to Sierra Leone
  –Conduct Training Session
  –Brainstorming Session
  –Participants were given digital cameras
Methodology

• Data Collection
  —Participants were given seven days to take photographs
  —After seven days, participants met with researcher & completed an in-depth interview

---

SHOWed Method

• What do you see here?
• What is really happening?
• How does it relate/affect our lives?
• Why does this problem/strength exist?
• What can we do about it?

---

Methodology

• Participants had the opportunity to view the transcription to verify accuracy
• A report was compiled and shared with the participants and the executive director of All As One
• A plan was prepared for social action
Slide 16

Reliability and Validity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal Validity</th>
<th>Credibility and Authenticity: Photovoice &amp; In-depth interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>External Validity</td>
<td>Transferability, Member checking and Transcription review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>Consistency: Following consistent protocol</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Slide 17

Results: Common Themes

- **Impeding Factors**
  - Extreme Poverty
  - Lack of Basic Needs
  - Poor Environment
  - Social-Behavioral Factors

- **Promoting Factors**
  - Strong Infrastructure
  - Positive Environment
  - Education
  - Economic Support

Slide 18

Results: Web of Causation

- Health Impeding Factors
- Health Promoting Factors
- Community Involvement
- Safe/Clean Environment
- Medical Access
- Strong Infrastructure
- Education
- Economic Support
- Poor Sanitation
- Limited Access to Medical Services
Lack of Basic Needs: Water Shortage

Participant B:
“These people are waiting for water. Some have come 5 to 6 kilometers. Because this is a picture of the environment where I live, it is a hill. Some come from up, some from down. The time I took this picture is almost the evening. Some of been waiting a long time for their turn. The water is coming out slow, it takes time.”

Poor Environment: Poor Sanitation
Participant G:

"The children going there are not protected. Some of them go there not having proper shoes on or no shoes. What if they decide to go and play there? They can take diseases around with them as well as the elderly people take the trash away instead of the children. What I want to emphasis here, I want to classify this as child abuse. Children do not know, they can pick up anything from anywhere and eat because they do not know the after effect so if we want to protect our children we should stop them from going. If they are not checked their health will be at stake. We should not only say this should be government, let this be a family issue. Let the families pick the issues up, address them and then tap the families on the shoulders for a job well done. We are leaving everything in the hands of government which is very, very troubling."

Participant A:

"Look at the environment, this is serious health problem... Serious health danger. This is right in front of their house. It is where they play."
Slide 25

Economic Support:
Community Involvement

___________________________________
___________________________________
___________________________________
___________________________________
___________________________________
___________________________________
___________________________________

Slide 26

Participant F:

"This is a positive, this place is owned by the woman by the door. She has young girls that apply to learn how to do the hair. She has a school for them to learn a trade."

___________________________________
___________________________________
___________________________________
___________________________________
___________________________________
___________________________________
___________________________________

Slide 27

Results: Action

• Providing Life’s Basic Needs
• Promote Social Welfare Programs for Children
• Educate and Sensitize Community About Healthy Environments

___________________________________
___________________________________
___________________________________
___________________________________
___________________________________
___________________________________
___________________________________
Slide 28

Results: Action

• Creating More Support for Orphans & Abandoned Children
• Offer school sponsorships
• Increase number of quality orphanages in Sierra Leone
• Sensitize the community on the importance of a child’s life

Slide 29

Discussion:
Impact of PAR on All As One

• All participants discussed the need for change to happen at the grassroots level
• All As One and its staff have made a commitment to provide community outreach
• Expanding its mission with the Grafton Project

Slide 30

Limitations

• Results are specific to this population
• However, the results can be used to provide a better understanding of lived experiences & guidelines to other organizations when using Action Research
Slide 31

**Recommendations**

- Utilize Photovoice with the Sierra Leonean children
- Collaboration between NGOs and Ministry of Social Welfare to create and implement standards for local orphanages

---

Slide 32

**More Questions? Contact…**

- Ashley Walker, Ph.D., CHES
  Ashley.Walker@unco.edu
- Jody Oomen-Early, Ph.D., CHES
  joomen@twu.edu

---

Slide 33

**References**


