Research corner: peer research – an opportunity to give back



Many thanks to Hani Michael, an Eritrean refugee who lives in Ethiopia, for drawing this sketch to accompany José's blog. It illustrates how peer researchers draw on insights from their own experiences.

In our latest blog, José shares some tips for peer researchers.

Peer research – an opportunity to give back

by José García

Undertaking peer research is an exciting and gratifying, but also challenging experience. For me, it has allowed me to work on topics around forced migration, bottom-up democracy and public insecurity, all of them issues that are not only close to my professional interests, but which are problems that have affected the communities where I grew up. Peer research has provided me with the scope to shape research processes, to connect with people with similar life experiences and, more importantly, to give something back to my and other vulnerable communities.

As a peer researcher I have become a sort of interlocutor between academics and government officials and the so called 'real world'. Across my career, I have conducted peer research for different organisations that has supported the development

of new legislation in the Falkland Islands, shaped higher education policies in Mexico and produced new insights that contributed to delivering impactful social policies in Iraqi Kurdistan. In Migration Yorkshire, I work with other peer researchers in various projects that are informing academic research on housing support for asylum seekers and refugees in the Yorkshire and the Humber region. In other words, being a peer researcher allows you to give marginalised and disenfranchised groups the opportunity to be heard by opinion makers and to potentially shape the decisions of decision makers.

However, throughout my research career I have found that to deliver effective, ethical and impactful research outputs, there are some things that a peer researcher should pay attention to. Here are a couple of my preferred tips that I hope can help you develop your peer research projects more effectively:

- Identify your passion: As social researchers we enjoy focusing on multiple topics at once, but sometimes we find it difficult to commit to one. To conduct effective peer research, you need to identify your passion, an issue close to your personal experience, to which you can devote 12 or more months of your life to asking difficult questions, challenging views and providing first-hand knowledge to your research colleagues.
- Be open to new and dissimilar views: Your experiences are not universal! All good researchers like to test ideas, but also to be challenged, to ensure their findings are as

accurate as they need to be. Thus, be open to learning new things, always! It is a great experience.

- Set yourself clear goals: What do you want to achieve with your research? How will this help you and your colleagues to achieve your research objectives? By when do you want to achieve what goals? These are some of the key questions that would allow you to better prepare a plan for your work. Remember, being a peer researcher is an opportunity to give back to the community, not only to produce evidence for your research team. From my point of view, findings that lack any sort of applicability into real life scenarios are meaningless.
- Take notes, many notes! You might end working with numbers, but the most important component of your research will be the anecdotes and stories, from the people you care about for your research. The more you capture them, the better your research will be.

As a peer researcher, you would have a key advantage: first-hand experience and knowledge on the research topic. It is then one of your tasks to use it to facilitate the involvement of key players, ensure all main voices are heard and contribute to creating balanced research. By doing this, you would allow your research to open new opportunities for the communities you care about the most.

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