Engaging primary school children through participatory community mapping to examine safe and unsafe routes between home and school in a rural South African community

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Background

• SA has one of the highest rates of GBV in the world\(^1\)
• Children are especially vulnerable to various forms of GBV
• In KZN, >3 million learners walk more than 1 hour to and from school\(^2\)
  – Rural /township learners more likely to walk than urban learners\(^2\)
• School journey potentially dangerous\(^3\):
  – Treacherous terrain and inclement weather
  – Kidnapped, physically attacked, mugged, bullying, &/or sexually abused

\(^1\)(Stats SA, 2018) \(^2\)(Porter et al., 2010) \(^3\)(Equal Education, 2017)
The risky school journey...

Four arrested over kidnapping teen in KZN

Girl (13) raped en route from school, man gets life sentence

Two men take turns 'raping' girls on their way home from school
Adolescent girl’s perception of risk

• Photovoice study in peri-urban community in KZN
• Adolescent girls described omnipresent harassment
• Creates fear of GBV (Ngidi et al., 2018)

They sit like this; morning, during the day, [and in the] afternoon. When girls pass by, [boys] whistle and stop you... and what they are doing makes you angry! (Nelly, 17-18 group)
Research with early adolescents

- Traditional methods (surveys, interview, focus groups) are useful
  - But adolescents may consider repetitive and boring (Wilson et al., 2007)

- Shifts in modes of communication, esp. among adolescents:
  - From face-to-face to technology-based – instant messaging, texting, social network sites (Baker & White, 2010; Woolford, Clark, Strecher, & Resnicow, 2010)

- Research approaches to study adolescent development and behaviours have changed over the last few decades

- Increasing recognition of the value of alternative qualitative methodologies that explore and describe sensitive, complex phenomena

- A picture is worth 1000 words
Alternate research approaches

• Arts-based methodologies/ participatory approaches
  – Photovoice (Wang, 1997)
  – Drawing (Mitchell, 2006)
  – Diaries (Alaszewski, 2006)
  – Music/ Hip Hop (Blunt, 2003)
  – (Ethno)Drama (Saldana, 2003)
  – Documentaries

• Commonality: Approaches are participant-centred (expert) – guided by researcher
Formative research aim & objective

**Aim**

• To understand learners’ experiences of the school journey

**Objectives**

• Use participatory community mapping to explore perceptions of:
  – Learner safety,
  – Experiences of GBV, and
  – Risks associated with learners walking particular routes to and from school
Research design: Piloting a WSB to prevent SRGBV

Phase I: Qualitative formative work
- Community mapping activity with focus group discussion
- Transect walk (n=8)
- Sample:
  - Learners (N = 20; 10-14 years)
  - Stakeholders

Phase II: Baseline survey (+/- N=450)
- Walking School Bus intervention (with control & learner transport comparison group) (N=450; n=150 per group)
- Photovoice focus group with learners (N=20)
- Endline survey (+/- N=450)

Phase III: Evidence into action plan
- Planned stakeholder activities with policymakers, Department of Education officials and other key stakeholders
Formative research activities

• **Participatory community mapping (n=19 adolescents; 3 FGDs)**
  – an emerging approach, within the broader participatory visual methodologies (PVMs), that engages child-participants in map creation using drawings.
  – Young adolescents (10-14 years old) in primary school participated in a participatory mapping exercise where they drew their communities, with a focus on school routes, and identified safe and unsafe spaces on route.
  – They also participated in discussions about their drawings, which also unpacked local definitions of bullying, harassment, and physical and sexual violence, including current practices for addressing and/or reporting these activities.

• **Transect walks (n=1 with learners; n=2 with community stakeholders)**
  – A transect walk is a systematic walk along a defined route (3km radius around the intervention school)
  – During the walk learners identified areas from their community maps and facilitators took photographs
Sample

Mapping/FGD (n=20)
- Male: 60% (n=12)
- Female: 40% (n=8)

Transect walk (n=8)
- Male: 50% (n=4)
- Female: 50% (n=4)
Method for mapping

- Drawing of journey to school
- Learners used green, orange and red stickers to identify areas along the route to/from school
- No limit on the number of stickers was specified, however learners distributed stickers evenly
  - Slightly more spaces marked as unsafe (38%)
Data analysis

• Community maps/transect walk photographs
  – Content analysis¹
    • Uploaded to Atlas ti.
    • Coding framework developed
    • Coded

• Focus group discussion transcripts
  – Thematic analysis²
    • Uploaded to Atlas ti.
    • Coding framework developed
    • Coded

¹(Amsden & Van Wynberghe, 2005) ²(Braun & Clarke, 2006)
Perceptions of safety

- Learners used green stickers to mark spaces they identified as safe
Perceptions of safety

• In group discussions, learners described home, school and community as safe

• Community maps completed individually:
  – only a third of learners marked their home (32%) and school (30%) as safe
  – Only 12% identified a neighbour’s house as a safe space
Perceptions of risk

• People
  – “A man helps children cross the road [to school] safely, so there’s nothing that could ever happen to us” (Female, FGD 1)
  – “The shop is safe because there are people there” (Female, FGD 2)

• Routes
  – “We reported [the boys that mugged us] to our parents and teachers, they told us to change the route that we used but because the route is a short cut, we continue to take it” (Male, FGD 2)

• Spaces
  – “Home is safe because it’s fenced” (Male, FGD 2)

(Female, 11 years, FGD 3)
Home and school marked as safe

(Male, 10 years, FGD 2)
Neighbours’ homes marked as safe
Perceptions of risk

• Learners used orange stickers to mark spaces they identified as sometimes safe and some times unsafe.
Perceptions of risk

• Across the sample the following were marked as sometimes safe and sometimes unsafe:
  – Spaces with animals and livestock
  – Car washes and taxi ranks

• Many spaces and routes were marked as both safe and unsafe
  – Safe
    • Home (only 1 learner identified their home as sometimes safe and sometimes unsafe)
    • Shop (shops that sell alcohol were considered sometimes safe and sometimes unsafe due to patrons who consume alcohol outside the shop)
    • Field (some fields were considered safe while others were considered unsafe. Fields designated for playing soccer were considered safe)
  – Unsafe
    • Field (fields that were secluded or empty were considered unsafe)
    • Abandoned/unfinished buildings (considered unsafe due to loitering people who consume alcohol/substances in buildings)
    • Forest (Only male learners marked the forest as sometimes safe and sometimes unsafe; all of the female learners marked the forest as unsafe)
Perceptions of safety

• Spaces
  – “the field where we play soccer is safe...people aren’t used to hanging out there” (Male, FGD 2)
  – Getting to the field was perceived as dangerous due to people considered dangerous along the route.

(Female, 12 years, FGD 1)
Home marked as (un)safe

(Male, 11 years, FGD 3)
Multiple areas marked as (un)safe
Perceptions of risk

- Learners used red stickers to mark spaces they identified as unsafe
Perceptions of risk

• Greater consensus among learners regarding unsafe spaces
  – Spaces considered unsafe
    • Taverns and spaces where people use alcohol and substances along the route
    • Animals (Stray dogs and livestock)
  – Infrastructural dangers
    • Busy roads without pavements
    • Footpaths through forests/across streams
• Types of violence differ across gender
  – Male: Harassment, mugging, physical violence
  – Female: Harassment, sexual violence
• No learners marked home or school as unsafe
Perceptions of risk

• Alcohol and substance related dangers
  – “When they’re drunk they want to hit you...I’ve been stopped before by someone who wanted to hit me” (Male, FGD 1)
  – “People get drunk and want to hurt you by hitting you” (Male, FGD 2)

• Sexual harassment related dangers
  – “He used to follow me...back from school” (Female, FGD 1)
  – “It’s scary to walk past [taverns/taxi ranks] because they might rape you” (Female, FGD 1)
  – “There’s a girl in grade 11...there were males sitting around [the tavern] they caught her and raped her” (Female, FGD 1)

(Female, 12 years, FGD 2)
Forest, tavern, water/stream marked as unsafe

(Male, 11 years, FGD 3)
Multiple areas with people marked as unsafe
Transect walk photographs

- Learners’ preferred routes perceived as shorter/quicker
- But these were often more dangerous:
  - Secluded
  - Infrastructure
Transect walk: unsafe spaces

Main road without pavements (left) - Unsafe

“Forest” (right) - Unsafe

Construction site (above) - Unsafe

Blood and stick from physical assault on a learner the day before the transect walk (above) - Unsafe
Participatory methods

- Important to triangulate data using mapping, focus group discussions and transect walks to gain a holistic narrative
  - Community maps provided:
    - A visualisation of learner perceptions; individualised
    - Enabled children to express their views, without solely relying on verbal communication
  - Focus group discussion provided:
    - Prompt discussion
    - Provides further qualitative data not presented on map
      - Eg. Time of day (Afternoon/early evening); weather (mist; rain)
  - Transect walk provided:
    - Details related to community map
    - Scale versus perception
      - Eg. Forrest versus clearing with +/- 40 tree
Conclusion

• Children actively engaged in their own risk landscapes which were related to several contextual factors - space, time, people, actions (see Harden et al., 2000).
• On the school journey, children often make decisions about risks and potential harms, and how to navigate these
• Critical to understand risk and safety from children’s perspectives.
• Using participatory/emancipatory approaches gives children opportunities to voice their concerns in their own right, rather than researchers ‘coming in’ and making assumptions on what is important or not
• Visual methodologies give voice to children; allow alternative ways of capturing and disseminating their concerns, as they see and experience them
• Primary benefits stemming from participatory tools:
  – Individual perspectives of safe and unsafe spaces per learner that may go unnoticed in a standard FGD (particularly related to variation within the sample)
  – Provides opportunities to prompt, deepen and enrich discussion
• There is clear value in involving children in empirical research concerning their lives using methods that are both comfortable, engaging and interactive.
• Such involvement is a crucial precursor to developing contextually-relevant interventions.
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References