THE CHALLENGES OF CONDUCTING ETHICAL AND RIGOROUS RESEARCH ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN SMALL, ISOLATED, HIGH-PREVALENCE COMMUNITIES

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WHAT I WILL SHARE WITH YOU TODAY IS INFORMED BY:
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- Side-meeting held at SVRI 2017 in Rio de Janeiro, on conducting research on VAW in small, isolated and high-prevalence settings;
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• A focus group discussion, hosted by Monash University in early-2019 with VAW researchers who had extensive experience conducting rigorous and ethical quantitative and qualitative research on violence against women in LMICs; and
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- The experience of researchers from EQI and our partner organisations’ conducting VAW research and evaluation in the Asia-Pacific region.
Research on violence against women raises unique ethical and methodological challenges.

The complex, hidden, and sensitive nature of VAW means that issues of safety and confidentiality are critical.
If not conducted carefully, VAW research can carry significant risks.

Investigating the prevalence and nature of VAW requires careful design and implementation to ensure that the research is ethical, safe, and rigorous.
CONDUCTING VAW RESEARCH IS CHALLENGING IN ALL CONTEXTS.
Conducting VAW research in small, isolated, high-prevalence communities present additional challenges related to:

- Sampling strategy
- Responding to disclosures
- Ensuring confidentiality & privacy
- Safety of respondents and researchers
- Vicarious trauma
- Data security issues
- Logistics
- Recruitment of local researchers
Existing guidelines recommend:

• Sampling density should ideally not be higher than 1 in 10 households.

The realities of working in small, remote, and high-prevalence setting:

• In a small or remote setting, such as a Pacific Island Country, it is difficult to achieve a large enough sample for statistical significance without drawing a higher sampling density.
MAINTAINING A LOW PROFILE

Existing guidelines recommend:

- Researchers should not stay for prolonged periods in research site.
- Use a ‘safe name’ for the study.
- Utilise ‘dummy surveys’.

The realities of working in small, isolated and high-prevalence setting:

- Lack of transport options and lack of accommodation options.
- Some of the recommended safeguards are often less effective or can only be used limited times.
- People living in close quarters without private space.
DATA SECURITY AND MANAGEMENT

Existing guidelines recommend:

- Storing sensitive material (paper or tablets) in secure place.
- Destroy paperwork post analysis.

The realities of working in small, isolated and high-prevalence setting:

- Challenges related to destroying paperwork
- There often aren’t lockable rooms or cupboards.
- In high-prevalence communities with rigid gender norms, it is often difficult for women to secure items privately.
RESPONDING TO DISCLOSURES

Existing guidelines recommend:

• Ample training for researchers so they understand how to handle disclosures in a sensitive, confidential, and safe way.

• Clear referral pathways.

• Establish a Safety and Support Plan.

• Additional resources (and funding!) for services.

The realities of working in small, isolated and high-prevalence setting:

• Formal services are non-existent.

• Referral pathways are patchy.

• In small communities people know one another – so while we strive for confidentiality, it is not always guaranteed.
1. Acknowledge that **different standards do apply to these contexts** and that the standards should be living document.
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2. Develop sets of guidelines for these specific settings to supplement the WHO guidelines.
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2. **Develop sets of guidelines** for these specific settings to supplement the WHO guidelines.

3. **Build a Community of Practice (COP)** of researchers who work in these settings.
SOLUTIONS AND WAYS FORWARD

4. Support capacity development of research ethic boards.
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5. Greater engagement, valuing, and capacity development of local, in-country researchers.
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5. Greater engagement, valuing, and capacity development of local, in-country researchers.

6. **Building the capacity of funders** so that this work is adequately funded.
THANK YOU
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