

COMMUNITY-LED TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH TOOLS AND APPLICATIONS: FROM CANADA TO NEPAL

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ABSTRACT

The deepening neoliberal agenda in our global context shines a light on historical and enduring inequities of colonial and class patriarchy. While praxis is a central feature of PAR, further attention to community-led actions is urgently needed to demonstrate the connection between method, application and social transformation. Focusing on two contexts, Canada and Nepal, we highlight examples of transformative community-led research tools through the lens of social work activism. By authenticating our theories of knowledge, we enter a critical discussion on the use of media conferences and street actions as designed and differentially employed in each study. We conclude with the limitations and transformative potential of PAR.

KEY WORDS: Community-based participatory research; Men's violence prevention roles; Trafficking survivors; Transformative actions

INTRODUCTION

The congruence between social work activism and transformative research resonates with those who are looking to change the root causes of oppression, advocate for progressive policies and empower communities through social and political action. Responding to the broadening reach of neoliberal politics across the globe, the two studies discussed in this paper, "*Engaging men in domestic violence prevention in Canada*" and "*Reintegration of trafficking survivors in Nepal*", emerged from local contexts in both Canada and Nepal, using a community based participatory research (CBPR) paradigm.

CBPR is an orientation to research (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995) that realizes the exploitative nature of traditional inquiry, particularly when done to oppressed communities; it focuses on issues and concerns identified by communities, and values collaboration and lived experiences as foundational to both research and the work of social change (Jacobson & Rugeley, 2007). CBPR encompasses “a social justice-oriented approach that recognizes the dynamic interplay of group work, research, and community change” (Jacobson & Rugeley, 2007, p. 21). The community-centeredness of our research is a theme sewn throughout the projects examined in this paper; beginning with social work practice prior to initiating a research study; we also demonstrate continuance, community-embeddedness and ongoing researcher commitment long after the study is complete.

The glaring light on historical and enduring inequalities of colonial and class patriarchy is increasingly evident as communities collectivise their efforts to resist and respond. Critical and qualitative research methodologies and methods have been used to analyse and address structural inequalities and gender oppression (Dhungel, Lama & Khadka, 2019; Guruge, Khanlou, & Gastaldo, 2010; Lather, 1991; Lorenzetti & Walsh, 2014). These have been broadly applied in academic environments and, particularly, in social work education and practice (Ledwith, 2011; Skinner, 2020). However, more participatory tenets of social justice research, such as inviting and supporting communities to become more intimately involved in identifying equity issues, together with developing transformative strategies and acting upon them, are still generally marginal, leaving both researchers and practitioners travelling on uneven ground (Maguire, 2001; Dhungel et al., 2019). In order to bridge the gaps in scholarly activities, this article explores the community-led implementation of participatory action research (PAR) tools undertaken in collaboration with Indigenous, racialized and white men in Canada; and survivors of sex trafficking in Nepal.

Drawing on the pervasive and globally recognized issue of violence against women (World Health Organization [WHO], 2013, 2016), the first study focuses on domestic or intimate partner violence within the Canadian context, which called for furthering men’s roles and engagement in violence prevention (Casey et al., 2013; Minerson, Carolo, Dinner & Jones, 2011). The second study, situated in Nepal, centers on the experiences, resilience and resistance of women survivors of sex-trafficking. These two action research studies, which emerged from their respective communities, offered opportunities to centralize “emerging tools, and new pathways to social change” (Lorenzetti, 2013, p. 451), catalyzed and employed as “pathways from oppression to liberation” (Dhungel et al., 2019, p. 39) as defined by the co-researcher team. With the intent of translating methodology into employable methods or action research tools, as activist scholars in social work, we examine the transformational capacity of these approaches, as discussed in studies in two different contexts, Canada and Nepal. Our paper is structured in six sections and they include: (1) owning our knowledge/situating ourselves; (2) praxis: PAR as a transformative research; (3) context/ overview of the two studies; (4) transformative research tools and their applications; (5) transformative impacts; and (6) power differences as limitations in PAR.

OWNING OUR KNOWLEDGE / SITUATING OURSELVES

Creswell (2007) affirmed that in research, what and how we write, “is a reflection of our own interpretations based on the cultural, social, gender, class, and personal politics that we bring to research” (p. 179). Further to this point, a co-reflective process clarifies these interpretations by making them visible and accountable to others, preventing us from “implicitly adopting a theory of knowledge” (Carter & Little, 2007, p. 1319). This accountability should have substantial bearing on all aspects of a PAR study.

Author 1. I entered and navigated the study with acknowledgement of several lenses, and an understanding that social location and experiences are interwoven as one narrative. I identify as a white Italian settler woman born on Kanien’kehá:ka (Mohawk) territory (Québec), living in an intercultural family/community on traditional Blackfoot territory (Alberta) while also rooted within an intergenerational family with migrant her/history. My perspective and actions in the study were influenced by over twenty-five years of social work activism and counselling in areas that include domestic and gender-based violence, peace-building, anti-racism, and an emerging decolonizing practice in my role as a social work academic. My cultural background and community experiences positioned me to see research as an activist tool, a reflection which I highlighted in an earlier writing: Research “is connected to one’s worldview or... convictions, which are shaped implicitly and explicitly by domination; so the values and convictions that one brings to any research undertaking will naturally position this research as supporting or countering an oppressive paradigm” (Lorenzetti, 2013, p. 452).

Author 2. I was born in a middle-class family in Nepal, in which the patriarchal system had been rigidly embedded in the culture and society. My birth gave my mother a label of “a rich woman of three daughters”, as another two daughters were already in the family. Sadly, I grew up with discrimination from my own family and others, however, with my mother’s support, I was sent to school with my two sisters; no one could prevent my mother from doing that. These childhood experiences shaped my epistemic and ontological orientations which were further developed through my research that allowed me to visit brothels and engage in conversations with Nepali women, who had been trafficked to brothels in India. Once the women learned that I was also from Nepal, they seemed to be very friendly and open to sharing their stories seemingly without any fear. For instance, the women, who had told me five minutes ago that they were happy in brothels as they were making money and also sending money to their families in Nepal, asked me with eyes full of tears to rescue them from the prison. I was not in a position to help them then – I felt vulnerable – and I left the place with lots of guilt and shame. This powerful experience made me angry at the unjust society and oppressive culture, but this elevated my social justice aspirations towards the ending of structural violence through transformative and emancipatory practice and research – this has become my commitment and recommitment in my social work journey.

The two studies, while separate, were connected in various ways. First, the two authors had a longstanding relationship as community organizers prior to entering academia to complete our PhDs. We then supported one another through critical discussions on PAR

methodologies and methods as we employed them with co-researchers in the two studies. We believe that our projects, which are both grounded in the realities of patriarchy and intersectionality, contribute to an important discussion on PAR as an emancipatory approach in research with diverse and differentially powered (men in Canada; women in Nepal) communities and geographical contexts. The two studies received ethics approval and were supported by PhD scholarships.

PRAXIS: PAR AS A TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN

Given the purpose and objectives of our respective studies, PAR as a transformative research approach was used both for knowledge generation and social change. PAR is profoundly rooted in the adult education movements of Latin America and the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (Fals Borda, 1988; Levine & Yeich, 1992). Contrary to attempts to dilute and co-opt PAR methods for neoliberal purposes (Fals Borda, 2001; Fals Borda & Rahman, 1991) through its employment “in various mainstream settings, including businesses and academia, without the inclusion of key elements that underscore a critical worldview” (Lorenzetti & Walsh, 2014), essential to PAR are critical reflection and reflexivity for personal and social transformation (Maguire, 1987; McIntyre, 2008; Selener, 1997). According to Maguire (1987), the ideas of Freire (1970) on popular education are grounded in key PAR principles that position oppressed people and communities as leaders and empowered contributors to knowledge construction and social change. Grounded in these principles, the intention of our research was to transform the subject-object relationship of traditional research to a more democratic subject-subject relationship, through praxis, action -reflection -action (Fals Borda, 1988). While imperfect and focused on the tensions of intersectional work, a dialectical process, praxis (Freire, 1970) allows researchers to critically reflect on intersectional oppression within a historical context and offers community members the role of co-researchers (Boylorn, 2008). Co-researchers in the context of our studies were involved in research design, knowledge creation, knowledge translation and knowledge mobilization, through social and political actions depending on their capacities and the areas of their interests (Bargal, 2008; Park, 2001). This process involves collectively investigating experiences. It includes collectivised dialogue on intersectional oppressions, developing transformational and empowering strategies/approaches to address the issues/oppressions identified, and then acting upon them (Dhungel, 2017; Dhungel et al., 2019; Freire, 1970; Park, 1993). Taken together, and focusing on the major aims of praxis, our PAR studies provided us (researchers and co-researchers) with opportunities to develop critical consciousness (Freire, 1970), and to work collectively towards transforming social structures and relations, as suggested by Maguire (1987).

CONTEXT/OVERVIEW OF THE TWO STUDIES

This section of our paper provides a brief background of the PAR studies that were led in collaboration with co-researchers. The two contexts were: (1) the absence and need for furthering men’s engagement in violence prevention in Canada; and (2) the pervasive reality of sex trafficking of women in Nepal and the need for survivor-led reintegration approaches.

Men's Roles in Violence Prevention in Canada

While the majority of men do not condone or perpetrate violence (Minerson et al., 2011), men are primarily responsible for physical and sexual violence within and outside intimate partnerships (WHO, 2016). In Canada, women experience almost 80% of intimate partner violence (IPV) and are 4.5 times more likely than men to be victims of spousal homicide (Statistics Canada, 2016). Further, racism and settler colonialism heighten the risk of IPV and other forms of violence for specific groups, and Indigenous women and girls in particular (Holmes & Hunt, 2017; National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, 2019). Preventing domestic violence is commonly viewed as a women's issue. However, within the last two decades, there has been a notable increase in the number of initiatives by men to address domestic and other forms of gender-based violence (GBV) (Carlson et al., 2015). Survey research conducted with men in Canada supports the view that most men see themselves as allies in violence prevention work (Lorenzetti et al., 2016). While these studies indicate agreement and possible interest among men to adopt violence prevention roles, little has been documented over the years about how the engagement of men in social justice work has led to a decrease in violence and greater gender equity (Carlson et al., 2015; Flood, 2010; Minerson et al., 2011). The need for community based and action-focused research is imperative to support those men who are committed to both critically reflecting on their positionality and working collectively to transform gender equity intentions into actionable roles.

A participatory action research framework grounded in a feminist and intersectional analysis (Reid & Frisby, 2008) was the conduit to engage twenty community men and five women violence prevention leaders from diverse ethnocultural communities in Alberta, Canada. Racialized immigrant men and Indigenous men led the project, inviting anti-racist white men to join after some initial planning. Collective knowledge and the emergence of a praxis framework from the study promoted men's engagement in allyship roles and community action. The emergence of a male-led violence prevention group, *Men's Action Network*, was an important outcome of the research, contributing to the exploration of new and potentially innovative ways to prevent domestic violence and reduce its impact.

Reintegration of Trafficking Survivors in Nepal

Nepal has demonstrated significant anti-trafficking efforts by developing national plans, laws, and policies, and a variety of approaches including preventive and protective measures such as the *National Plan of Action against Trafficking in Persons, especially Trafficking in Women and Children* (2012), and the *Human Trafficking and Transportation Control Act* (2007). However, most intervention models adopt a welfare approach that focuses on prevention but does not adequately address the needs of trafficking survivors, specifically reintegration into families, communities, and society (Buet, Bashford, & Basnyat, 2012; Chaulagai, 2009; Dhungel, 2017; Dhungel et al., 2019; Sharma, 2014). Studies of survivors' struggles with reintegration and ongoing social exclusion suggested that limited attention paid to these issues by government decision-making and policy formulation processes is a major factor (McNeill, 2008; Samarasinghe & Burton, 2007; Sharma, 2014). What exactly governments should do in the social service sector remains

unclear; however, a number of studies asserted the need for further research focused on the reintegration of trafficking survivors (Buet, Bashford, & Basnyat, 2012; Chaulagai, 2009; Locke, 2010; McNeill, 2008; Sharma, 2014). Therefore, this study was initiated to bridge the gaps by inviting trafficking survivors to get involved in the research process, including knowledge generation, data analyses and transformative actions.

Grounded in a collective and solidarity approach, the author/researcher, in collaboration with eight trafficking survivors, conducted a study to collectively understand their intersectional gender oppressions in their reintegration and address the challenges in solidarity in Nepal, through the use of PAR as a transformative methodology. The dialogical process or praxis allowed co-researchers to become actively involved in identifying issues in their reintegration and developing strategies to address the identified issues. Subsequently, the co-researchers collectively chose and used a range of transformative methods for both knowledge generation and transformative impacts which are discussed in this paper.

TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH TOOLS AND COMMUNITY APPLICATIONS

This section of the paper offers a discussion of some key research tools that were developed and employed by the co-research teams through the two studies. We focus specifically on how PAR was used to facilitate media events and street actions for the advancement of community engagement and personal/social transformation in both Canada and Nepal.

'Speak Out and Action': Media Conference and Community Gathering (Canada)

Primary prevention, the focus of this research project with men, was intended to disrupt violence before it occurs by confronting its socially constructed root causes (Harvey, Garcia-Moreno & Butchart, 2007). A primary prevention approach to a social or public health issue such as domestic violence “relies on identification of the underlying, or ‘upstream’, risk and protective factors.... and action to address those factors” (Locke, 2010, p. 5). Aligning with this focus, the twenty men invited to join the study were asked if they could confirm that they were: (a) not involved in relationships with domestic violence; (b) interested in men’s roles in preventing domestic violence; and (c) supportive of gender equity. In the project, we were looking for potential “community leaders” who had done some of their own personal work. As the project unfolded and conversations deepened, the multiple roles of the men in perpetuating and reinforcing acceptable forms of patriarchy became further apparent to co-researchers, as highlighted by the following co-researcher quote:

They are selling masculinity in a bottle. Expectations and acceptance is like a male and female socket – they go together. Because what is expected is acceptable and what is unexpected is difficult to accept. (Vic Lantion, Co-researcher)

Speak Out and Act was a community-based gathering and media conference initiated and led by men co-researchers. A domestic murder of three people occurred in the community that touched a number of co-researchers in a personal way due to the interlinking of

community and cultural networks, and this motivated our group's growing commitment to outreach. Inspired by one co-researcher from India, Binu Sebastian, the research team planned its first *Speak Out and Act* community event. The gathering was organized in collaboration with local organizations and the extended family of those who were directly affected. Co-researchers submitted a request to a local foundation to provide funding for supper and other supplies, and several others engaged in door-to-door outreach. Seventy people attended, including family members and neighbours of those who were murdered. Binu wrote a media release, which was edited by the group; this was then sent to numerous media outlets, two of which attended this event. An excerpt from the media release underscores the purpose of the event, its community-focus and the emerging roles of the men and the *Men's Action Network* as a grassroots group of male domestic violence prevention leaders:

A Community Vigil, Conversation and Fellowship Dinner is scheduled to take place at a local community organization to commemorate the tragic loss of two young women. The meeting is expected to bring together concerned community members and organizations who want to create greater awareness on the issue of domestic violence and plan preventative actions. The event is free and open to the public. This event is being organized by Men Action Network (MAN-C), a group of men from various backgrounds who are committed to enhancing men's roles in violence prevention. According to MAN-C member Vic Lantion, a physician from the Philippines and convener for the group: "We need a strong community response to such issues. This is what we are hoping to initiate with this event. It's now time we speak candidly about male aggression and gender inequality in schools, families, neighborhoods, religious institutions and the workplace".

Importantly, two men co-researchers acted as media contacts and another four volunteered as contacts for the poster. The leadership of community men in MAN-C was evident in several ways through this action, including its design and inception by Binu Sebastian, the funding proposals, media and post by Adrian Wolfleg, an Indigenous member of the group. Fanny Oliphant, a female violence prevention leader and co-researcher from Mexico, was also a media contact. The organizing of *Speak Out and Act* and the positive community response were catalysts for the initiation of a second *Speak Out and Act* event, and work that extended beyond the termination of the official research phase, including a formal advocacy and community-based organization, discussed further in this paper.

Speak Out and Act, as a transformative participatory research tool, allowed for men to explore a variety of ways to begin making a change in their community. The focus on accountability of men's violence and the visibility of positive male role models are both essential in preventing violence and abuse in our community. As documented by the group in a public release:

If creating healthy families and communities is our ultimate objective, then we need the good majority of men to do more than simply not assaulting or abusing

someone. We should firm up men's commitment and leadership to preventing and ending intimate partner and gender-based violence. MAN-C believes that every man can be a leader. Men are in positions to influence the men and boys they are dealing with every day in various roles as: father, uncle, brother, coach or taxi driver. Men need to influence other men to commit to observing women's rights, autonomy, and well-being at all times.

Press Conference in Nepal

By recognizing the fact that the media and communities play key roles in escalating sex-trafficking survivors' trauma and further hindering them in their reintegration, the research team developed some educational campaigns to raise awareness about survivors' challenges in reintegration back to their communities. This resulted in a press conference that was organized two days before we celebrated the completion of the study. The purpose of the press conference was to share the key learning and findings of this transformative study. The conference began with a welcome remark by one of the co-researchers. This was the first time she was exposing herself as a survivor in a public setting, which was highly appreciated by participants in attendance. During the lunch, for instance, a few participants reached out to her and expressed their gratitude for her daring and prowess. This was followed by a brief presentation on the study and its transformative process, wherein collective actions and transformative impacts on both personal and societal levels were discussed. The conference also allowed the co-researchers, who expressed their willingness to share their experiences, to directly talk to the media. The conference concluded with two co-researchers presenting recommendations and guidelines developed by the group for future media reporting on issues related to trafficking survivors, which had been discriminatory and stigmatizing up to that point. This session certainly made some media offended and disappointed and they expressed their anger to the co-researchers. In response, one of the co-researchers reported her terrible experiences with the media by sharing:

I have been asked several times to share what happened in brothels. This is something that I do not want to remember and also you do not need to know this. What you need to know is that we need all of you and your support. You can do a lot through the use of your pen. You can change our lives not to escalate our trauma by asking disrespectful questions.

This co-researcher certainly helped the media to calmly and critically understand how their behaviors/actions further oppressed the survivors and some media thanked the research team for organizing this event by saying, "otherwise we would not be able to reflect on our own behaviours and actions and their impacts on others. Now we know our roles in helping you in reintegration". Then a few media invited two co-researchers for interviews and later the women reported that the interviews proceeded in a very respectful manner.

The following week, through praxis, the research team had an opportunity to reflect on the press conference. The meeting started with everyone's thoughts about the press conference held the previous week and all agreed that the conference achieved our goal of

raising awareness around their concerns and issues to the journalists. One of the women shared, “I found out that our recommendations made some journalists very uncomfortable and they seemed to be resistant in following the recommendations”. Another woman commented:

We wanted to show them some of the questions they ask of survivors are very inappropriate and unacceptable. They just need to know we are no different than others. I don't care if they are happy or not. I must say they are one of the perpetrators who make us vulnerable in our reintegration.

The press conference, organized and facilitated by trafficking survivors, was historic and unprecedented research in the Nepalese context. This conference allowed the women as co-researchers to come to the public and share their transformative stories for the first time. In parallel, this helped the media to understand the need to use inclusive and appropriate language, especially when they interview trafficking survivors, in order to prevent the women from being further traumatized.

Street Actions in Canada: Men's Ally Roles

Take Back the Night (TBTN) is an annual violence prevention event in North America that has been led by women for decades, highlighting the pervasiveness of gender-based violence and centralizing women's lack of safety and security. In recent years, this event in the local context has furthered its focus on the realities of violence against Indigenous women, two-spirit and trans communities as well as intersectional oppression. While the presence of men has been primarily welcomed at some of these events, their roles remained largely unclear. With two of the research team, Arya Boustani and Grant Neufeld having attended and supported TBTN over the years, co-researchers decided that their first group action would consist of ally work with TBTN. After receiving an affirmative response from TBTN organizers, a men's chili cooking night was organized at the home of a co-researcher, Arya. This event was an opportunity to both discuss men's ally roles and to also learn a new recipe that men could take home to their families. Everyone brought an ingredient or food contribution. Two days later, the men then served the chili to more than 80 people, primarily women, who attended the annual TBTN violence prevention rally. Two co-researchers who previously supported TBTN, led the serving and encouraged the others.

The positive response that the group received from organizers and participants of TBTN through emails and word of mouth was a catalyst for co-researchers to continue to develop their public presence. As the men became increasingly involved in community action, a coffee group was formed among some co-researchers, named the “Hopeful Romantics”. The coffee meetings became the venue for debriefing and planning outreach and community activities and building relationships. The term “Hopeful Romantics” was used to highlight the importance of hope and vision for a world without violence, and it also became a friendly joke over time among the group. A statement by one co-researcher below, summarizes the nature of the team's debrief session following TBTN.

There seems to be a demand for engaging men and boys and reducing domestic violence. We should look for the opportunity to engage men and boys in domestic violence prevention and take the opportunities that we think we can handle. If there is a request for our support – we should identify what we can do. And establish partnerships. We can match some of the men that we have with the requests and then see what kind of capacity building we need as a group. We should see what partners can help with support and coordination.

MAN-C participation and allyship in TBTN and other violence prevention actions continued following the research period. MAN-C members worked towards developing outreach activities that would demonstrate the groups' core values, leadership and community focus. The public emergence of a 'men's group against violence' was not without complexity, as it took time to develop trust in NGO and activist circles that had previously dealt with Men's Rights groups, which were hostile to gender equity.

Street Dramas in Nepal

A concept of street dramas on the topic of "Stories of Trafficking Survivors and their Resiliencies" was developed by the research team, mainly the trafficking survivors. The research team performed the drama in four different places to educate people on the issues that vulnerable women to trafficking face, and the intersectional gender oppression that the trafficking survivors experience in their reintegration. These were attended by academics, teachers, school and university students, policy makers, police officers and communities. The research team picked Bardiya District for our first street drama as one of our co-researchers was from the district and the people from Bardiya had discriminated and exhibited micro-aggressive behaviours against her after returning to Nepal. The research team developed a number of request letters, which they were required to send to elected officials, local agencies and police officers in Bardiya, seeking their support to help make our events successful and take place without any disturbances. I shared the concept of the drama based on stories and narratives that had been brought to me by the co-researchers, both individually and collectively, and then the group decided on the roles for each individual.

As an academic researcher wanting to support the group's message, I suggested changing a bit of the story and dialogue when I saw that the woman who was acting as the role of a madam in a brothel uttered several bad words. Not surprisingly, the women were reluctant to accept the changes that I had proposed. I became very happy when one of the co-researchers contended:

We know what we need to show the public and what they need to understand. The message we want to deliver is not possible without using all the bad words. The language and words we are using are absolutely appropriate in this context because people do not know how miserable we were in India. By using these types of words, I believe people will feel our pain.

I then felt very guilty and reflected on why I had not even realized that this was all about their stories, their lived experience. I apologized for this mistake and assured them I would not tell them what to say in the drama. As we went through the rehearsal, we changed the story several times and added something reflecting their collective experiences and reflections on reintegration at the end of the story. We had approximately 100 people in attendance when we performed our first drama for 45 minutes. After the drama, an evaluation form was distributed to participants that asked them to share their learning reflections from the drama with us. Later in our group meeting, the co-researcher who interviewed the audiences after the drama also shared the positive comments and experiences expressed in the meeting. The research team agreed that the trip was very enjoyable, memorable, and certainly productive.

TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACTS

In the Canadian context, the research tools discussed had implications for both the co-research team's personal growth and the social impact in the communities where men were seen as taking action on issues that were formerly relegated as 'women work' - positioning those who experience the greater burden of oppression with the responsibility to 'fix it'. Importantly, for the *Speak Out and Act* Media campaign, six men stepped up to be acknowledged as men opposing violence against women - with two men co-researchers (one Indigenous and one immigrant man) acting as media contacts and another four volunteering to put out their names as contacts for the poster. The leadership of community men in the group, and the leadership of Indigenous and racialized immigrant men, was evident in several ways through this action, including its inception, the funding proposals, media and poster contacts, implementation, and speaking roles. The organizing of *Speak Out and Act* and the positive community response were catalysts for the initiation of a second *Speak Out and Act* event and further public activities. The following events focused on the concept of 'prevention', which gathered support from multiple stakeholders including domestic violence agencies, ethno-cultural associations and faith organizations. An excerpt from the "media/community release" prepared by Vic Lantion, Binu Sebastian and Abbas Mancey, a co-researcher from Guyana, centers on the transformative concept of men's accountability for violence prevention in future work of the group.

Speak Out and Act allows for men to explore a variety of ways men can begin making a change in their community. The focus on accountability of men's behaviors is essential in preventing violence and abuse in our community. Responses that take the responsibility away from men as part of the problem only prevent us from finding effective solutions.

In tandem with the objective of men being visible and accountable for violence prevention, the group initiated a *Violence Prevention Pledge*, which included a public signing of a large banner and wallet-sized cards that could be carried by members who made a commitment to speak out against violence. The concept of "leadership from within", coined by the group, best articulates the nature of personal transformation that was initiated or grew from the community-led actions. As a critical outcome of this research, leadership from within was described as a necessary tenet of being recognized as a male ally and engaging in the work

of violence prevention. This was well-articulated by one co-researcher and confirmed by the group:

I have come to realize that as an active MAN-C advocate, I have to be a living witness in my own domestic relationship by modeling what I know and learn.

This was echoed by another participant, who stated: “The more I learn, the more that I become calm and I can look at my situation and try to do it better”. Leadership from within, or “inner work” (Palmer, 2000, p. 8), while a necessary ingredient in all community work, was of particular importance in MAN-C as they group began to review and transform their own relationships – making a greater link between gender inequality and gender-based violence.

In the context of Nepal, the use of the two transformative tools discussed earlier helped to achieve both personal and social transformations. Co-researchers reported that through praxis, they built their critical thinking and interpersonal skills, and this was demonstrated by the way they spoke to the media about how they should interview and write about survivors and by the way they performed street dramas without any scripts. Feedback from attendees of the press conference suggested this was an effective intervention not only for co-researchers; it also transformed community perceptions and stereotypes. As one of the journalists stated:

It was a good learning opportunity for me who just began a career in this field. I will be very cautious and sensitive what I ask and how I write about them. I got very motivated and feel like I want to work in the areas of gender violence such as trafficking and child abuse. Thank you for organizing this conference. It is very eye opening.

The willingness of the media to report on the news conference suggested this message reached many more people. Several national and local newspapers published the stories exactly how we wished they would. They highlighted the press conference, the challenges the survivors faced in their reintegration, and the support and attitudes survivors most need from the community to help them with their reintegration. Similarly, a co-researcher reflected on her personal transformation by sharing:

It was not necessarily a need to talk about our issues in a closed room. By discussing our issues in this environment and learning from participants today, I felt I have done nothing wrong in my life. I used to blame myself for my situation but now...

Similarly, in response to my question about their thoughts on if we had achieved the goals from the street dramas, one co-researcher commented:

I think we did achieve our goals more than 100 percent as I never thought we would have so many people in the audience for the drama and lots of participants for interactive sessions as well. After the drama, one of the residents living close to my

house came to me and said “please forgive me for all that I did to you. I know I treated you very badly when you came back from India and now you are the one who was able to open my eyes. If I had not come to watch this drama. I would not understand what you folks are going through and what can be done.

Overall, this transformative study provided the co-researchers with opportunities to advance their leadership roles and address reintegration issues they identified through praxis. The emergence of a *Survivors-Led Action Women’s Research Group* was an important action outcome of the research, and the group is still working together in anti-trafficking efforts in different roles and capacities. This study contributed to the exploration of new and potentially transformative and liberatory ways to address reintegration issues and promote transformative impacts.

POWER DIFFERENCE AS LIMITATIONS IN PAR

While this study discusses both the application and potential of participatory research tools, it is pertinent to underscore how power relations/power inequity limit the transformative potential and impact of both studies. Power differentials, expressed in covert and insidious forms, may have limited the leadership potential of specific co-researchers, and may have inhibited open discussions or frank critiques of the academic researchers, the functioning of the group or decision making processes. More evident forms of power inequity that we as academic researchers discussed with co-researchers in each project included: researchers’ ability to pay honouraria; the difference in economic well-being between researchers and most participants (including status as academic researchers); researcher access to information and opportunities, and a perception among some agencies, media or community stakeholders that the academics were the leaders and owners of the research projects. Understanding and discussing power positions and power relations with our respective co-research teams would lead us, as academic researchers, to conclude that power inequity created a number of known, unknown or (un)conscious limitations to collaborative decision-making within our study groups and the overall research process.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

This paper draws from two community-based participatory studies that respond to the pervasive issue of gender-based violence, highlighting the empowered roles of co-researchers as very different actors with diverse access to power and experiences of intersectional oppression. The relationship between poverty, masculinity norms, and gender-based violence is of importance to both studies as each focused on the impacts of colonial and class patriarchy on two distinct groups of participants with very different roles.

Our studies highlight the importance and challenges of centralizing ‘action’ within PAR research, underpinning its role in both personal and social transformation within our respective studies. Focusing on media conferences and street actions planned and implemented by two separate co-research teams in Canada and Nepal, we demonstrate both the relationship-building and critical consciousness work that, as noted by Freire

(1970), are necessary grounding for impactful collective action. This consciousness work for both researchers and co-researchers is not without struggle. The transfer of ownership from researchers to participants is critical in order to make space for research participants to occupy the space and roles of co-researchers. Transferring ownership in PAR involves addressing our own unearned power-over relationships with participants that is taught and replicated in academic spaces, including a sense of entitlement to be 'seen and heard', rather than facilitate and enable. In the Canadian study with men who were exploring and enacting their roles in domestic violence prevention work, this included creating space for male-identified community members to take action against male-perpetrated violence. In Nepal, the co-researchers exercised their collective will that "bad words" – words that had been used against them as women survivors of sex trafficking – be used in the street dramas to underscore how they were treated in the context of 'real life'. In both examples, allegiance to academic research agendas is challenged as the will of co-researchers is exercised by an increasing ownership of how their stories are told and how personal and social transformation is guided.

Further, by stepping into the community with research tools that were intended to provoke transformation within the context of the public life, the interplay of relationships, action and reflection both within the research team and with the interacting community deepened the co-researchers sense of purpose and passion for the work. The men in Canada who were emerging in their roles as violence prevention advocates began to further question practices within their own relationships; women survivors of sex trafficking in Nepal expressed their empowerment in no longer feeling that they need to hide their past experiences of oppression from the broader community.

Transformative research methods through PAR, while tension-fraught and replete with contradictions, resonate with activist scholars within the field of critical social work, which advocates for a social work praxis grounded in a reflexive relationship between theory and action (International Federation of Social Workers, 2018). The co-design and actioning of participatory and transformative research tools are urgently required to expand community leadership and voice on issues of injustice. The organizing and mobilizing work of a men's violence prevention group in Canada and an empowered Women Survivors group in Nepal are examples that dismantle the notion of 'inevitability' (Freire, 1970), which maintains current social hierarchies. By creating space for co-researchers to own the transformative process and be acknowledged as leaders of actions employed within the context of the broader community, the potential is heightened for research to be enacted as a liberatory strategy rather than a presage of deepening local and global inequities. ■

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