Confronting uncomfortable truths: Unlearning colonial research methods for VAWG knowledge production and research

SVRI Forum Pre-conference Workshop
Monday, 19 Sept 2022
Acknowledgement of Country(ies)

This workshop is taking place on the traditional lands of the Maya Peoples. The facilitators wish to acknowledge their custodianship and cultural and spiritual connections to the land on which we meet today.

This workshop was co-developed by the facilitators in South Africa, home to many First Nations peoples, and on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung People, in Naarm (Melbourne, Australia).

We pay our respects to the Traditional Owners and Custodians of that land, and pay respect to their elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge sovereignty was never ceded and pay our respects to the leadership role Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and other First Nations people around the world, play in addressing Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG).
Today’s workshop is...

• For VAWG researchers (also practitioners, funders, diversity and inclusion officers)

• To challenge the pervasive and entrenched inequalities in VAWG research and knowledge production

• Primarily for High-Income Country (HIC) researchers who want to interrogate their power and privilege. Researchers from the Global South and Indigenous researchers are welcome.

• Focussed on principles and practices drawn from Indigenist, feminist and decolonial practice.

• A space to sit with discomfort
INTRODUCTIONS: YOUR FACILITATORS

Ayesha Mago (she/her)

- I am an Indian woman living in Cape Town.
- Global Advocacy Director at SVRI.

Loksee Leung (she/her)

- I am an Australian citizen from an immigrant household (Hong Kong-born).
- Research and Evaluation, Senior Manager at EQI.
- Educated in Australia, PVAW research, M&E, and policy experience in Australia, South-East Asia, and the Pacific.

Sarah Homan (she/her)

- I am a White, Australian-born settler, descendant of Welsh and Irish immigrants.
- Senior Research Associate at EQI.
- PhD in Anthropology from the University of Adelaide. PhD looked at Nepali women’s experiences of violence, honour, and shame.
We are a global feminist agency working to advance gender equality and end violence against women and girls. We bring together research, policy design and creative communications to achieve our vision of a world in which diversity is celebrated, all people are respected, and power and resources are shared.

The SVRI is the world’s largest network on research on violence against women and violence against children, providing a space where global role players in the field connect with one another, share and promote their research, work to influence policies and improve the lives of those who have experienced gender-based violence.

We do this through funding research, strengthening research capacity, promoting partnerships and influencing change.
Icebreaker
Getting to know you

**AIM: TO GET TO KNOW WHO’S IN THE ROOM AND MOVE OUR BODIES**

1. We’re going to ask a series of questions to help us understand who is in the room today.
2. When you hear the statement that best describes you, get up and move to the part of the room (Ayesha, Sarah, and Loksee will be our signposts) and find your group.
3. Once you’ve moved to your part of the room, please find one person in your group who you don’t know and introduce yourselves: your name, pronouns, organisation, and role.
Are you primarily a...

1. Researcher? *(Find Sarah)*
2. Program Implementer? *(Find Loksee)*
3. Policy-maker or Funder? *(Find Ayesha)*
4. Other? *(Stand in the middle)*

Now find a person near you and introduce yourself!
What superpower would you prefer to have?

1. Flying? *(Find Sarah)*
2. Teleportation? *(Find Loksee)*
4. Other? *(Stand in the middle)*

Now find a person near you and introduce yourself!
On the topic of decolonising research, I...

1. Am relatively new to the topic *(Find Sarah)*
2. Feel somewhat familiar with the topic *(Find Loksee)*
3. Feel familiar with the topic *(Find Ayesha)*

Now find a person near you and introduce yourself!
SAFETY AND SUPPORT
Aim to achieve a safe space (but acknowledge we can’t guarantee it)

Please see SVRI supports as needed

GROUP AGREEMENTS
Respect
Curiosity
Time management
Self/collective care

Anything else?

LANGUAGE
Decolonising
Low- and middle-income contexts
Historically marginalised people

WE ACKNOWLEDGE
The expertise in the room
Decolonisation is a contested term
Tensions and discomfort

WAYS OF WORKING TODAY
The Parking Lot

What gets ‘parked’ here?

• Questions/topics that take us in wonderful but different directions

• Questions posed which we can revisit later (time allowing)

• Food for thought

You are welcome to have side conversations throughout the Forum based on the questions posed and conversations had here.
WHICH I THINK IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PART.
WHAT DO WE MEAN WHEN WE TALK ABOUT (DE)COLONISING RESEARCH?

Colonisation is the dispossession, genocide, and repression of Indigenous people and their cultures AND the ongoing systems of power that normalise so-called Western values as superior and includes interlocking forms of oppression.

Colonisation was (and still is) driven by research into colonised populations and used as a way to oppress & keep taking away knowledge, resources, and culture from people (Ndiovu-Gatsheni 2017; Mandani 2013).

Decolonising knowledge and research, therefore, works to achieve empowerment and justice, especially for Indigenous people and other historically marginalised groups (Cox 2017) and rejects Western superiority, emphasising a “plurality of values, practices and knowledges, especially Indigenous knowledges” (Megaw et al. 2017).

‘Neo-colonial’ relationships between researcher(s) and the “researched” still exist (Mannell et al. 2021).

This is why Indigenous and historically marginalised populations are often distrustful of research projects today (see Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012).
WHAT DO WE MEAN WHEN WE TALK ABOUT (DE)COLONISING RESEARCH?

Drawing upon and inspired by the work of many Indigenous and LMIC scholars, activists, practitioners, artists.

Intersectional feminist approaches and decolonising approaches: how do they overlap?
APPLYING DECOLONISING APPROACHES TO VAWG RESEARCH

Legacies of colonisation and other intersecting forms of oppression create systemic challenges to progressing gender equality, human rights and the health and wellbeing of women and girls, and gender-diverse people all around the world.

Research on VAWG and GBV can oftentimes perpetuate - or even deepen - the inequities it seeks to address.
Ethical, feminist and decolonial VAWG research practice should become the norm.

Gender inequality is the root causes of VAWG and the high rates of VAWG experienced in many LMICs and Indigenous communities globally, are intimately connected to colonialism and other intersecting forms of oppression.

Colonised countries are 50 times more likely to have a high prevalence of intimate-partner violence against women. When a patriarchal society is combined with a history of colonialism, the risk of domestic violence increases. (Mannell et. al. 2021)
PAUSE & CHECK-IN
The injustices of the past* can never be undone however, that doesn’t mean we mustn’t work in better, more equitable ways.

Research should:

- Explicitly acknowledge colonisation and power
- Move towards practices of equity and justice
- Combine Indigenous and ‘Western’ ways of working and knowing
- Involve meaningful partnerships centred on and driven by participants
- Disrupt colonialism
DISCUSSION QUESTION

Can you share any examples of research projects, where Global North researchers and research funders have perpetuated and benefited from colonial power structures and colonial research practices?
WHAT DO WE DECOLONISE?

1. LANGUAGE
   How do we talk about research?

2. RESEARCHERS + INSTITUTIONS
   Who does the research?

3. FUNDING + AGENDA SETTING
   Who decides and pays for research? And how is funding done?

4. PRACTICES + METHODS
   How do we come to know things?

5. RELATIONSHIPS
   How do we partner and work with others?

6. SHARING KNOWLEDGE
   How do we disseminate and share knowledge and with whom?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Learning, reflection, and reflexivity</td>
<td>Centre Indigenous and local knowledges, lived experiences and contributions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Flatten hierarchies and develop equitable partnerships</td>
<td>Practice Reciprocity and be of benefit to communities</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Centre Indigenous and local knowledges, lived experiences and</td>
<td>Fund ethically</td>
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<tr>
<td>contributions</td>
<td>Fund ethically</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Practice Reciprocity and be of benefit to communities</td>
<td>Conduct ethical and safe research</td>
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<td>5. Conduct ethical and safe research</td>
<td>Be transformative</td>
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<td>6. Be transformative</td>
<td>Ensure accessibility</td>
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<td>7. Ensure accessibility</td>
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<td>8. Fund ethically</td>
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Reflexivity = we acknowledge how our own beliefs, attitudes, identities, and life experiences shape how we work, and use this to improve methods.

Researchers must continuously learn and understand how their research is situated within intersecting systems of oppression.

Practice can include:

- Practice continuous individual and collective reflection.
- Ask yourself “Am I best placed to conduct this research?”
- Recognising and acknowledging your positionality (include and normalise position statements).
Colonialism is grounded in inequity and hierarchy.
Research from HICs also can only ever be conducted through a colonial lens.
Where possible, engage in fair and meaningful partnerships with shared decision-making.
Conducting research *with*, not *on*, communities.

**Practice can include:**

- Establish decision-making protocols that share power: Ask ‘who has input?’ ‘Who has power?’
- Employing multi-disciplinary and participatory research.
- Appointing research lead(s) who are from the community, and not limiting their roles to overseeing fieldwork, but have them engaged across all phases of the project.
• ‘Western’ knowledge has been highly valued and cast as ‘scientific’. ‘Non-Western’ ways of knowing have been viewed as ‘unscientific’ and therefore, ‘lesser than’.

• To restore equity and justice to research, valuing other knowledges need to be at the forefront of decolonising practice.

• ‘Nothing about us, without us’.

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<th>Practice can include:</th>
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<td>• Include researchers and stakeholders from historically marginalised backgrounds in advisory boards (and pay them).</td>
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<td>• Be informed by other knowledges, such as in literature reviews, include grey literature, and the voices of those from LMICs, with lived experiences, from the communities, etc.)</td>
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4: PRACTICE RECIPROCITY AND BE OF BENEFIT TO COMMUNITIES

- Traditionally viewed as ‘giving back’ in response to the extractive nature of research. However, must not be viewed transactionally, but as continuous and grounded in relationships.
- Research must never be driven by the sole intentions of the researcher (funders, governments etc), but be relevant and beneficial to communities.
- Benefit determined by communities and coming out of meaningful partnerships.

**Practice can include:**

- At the bare minimum, report back to participants and to communities.
- Adequately remunerate participants and communities for their time, effort, and knowledge. Put this in budget lines!
- Negotiate reciprocity with community (e.g., ‘capacity development’ on their terms).
5: CONDUCT ETHICAL RESEARCH

- Adhere to ethical practices of ‘do no harm’
- Culturally-specific protocols for ethics and safety developed in partnership with community and local stakeholders.

**Practice can include:**

- Ensuring strong support services are in place (budget for these support services).
- Data sovereignty written into contracts.
- Researchers undertaking cultural safety training.
- Building in project check-ins to ensure ongoing ethical considerations.
6: BE TRANSFORMATIVE

• The research *process* and recommendations seek to transform unequal power structures, including harmful and rigid gender norms, and gendered, colonial structures and other systems of oppression.

### Practice can include:

- Engaging in ‘two-way learning’.
- ‘Build capacity’ of local community members to conduct research – this is good.
- Supporting community-led research (rather than leading ourselves) – this is better.
- Meet people where they’re at.
• Research is often disseminated in ways inaccessible to research participants and other stakeholders.

• Overcoming barriers (such as access, comprehension, language, technologies, etc) should be part of research planning. Research should also be shared in ways useful to the community.

Practice can include:

• Making research products (including Terms of References, research protocols, tools, reports, and other communications products) linguistically and culturally accessible.
• Meeting disability access requirements.
• Account for and consider specific needs of communities in low bandwidth settings (e.g.: Ensure accessible file sizes).
By this we mean funding that acknowledges, and addresses power dynamics, involves honest, transformative relationships between donors and grantees and creates accessible and equitable processes that support priority driven research in LMICs conducted by LMIC researchers.

Practice can include:

- Simplifying processes and paperwork that focus only on what really needs to be known, and eliminating jargon that could alienate or exclude certain groups.
- Setting specific priorities so that they are accounted for in proposals, and ensure that budget lines exist for these. For instance, for counselling and well-being for researchers, or for translation of research products.
10 MIN

Afternoon tea break
What is SVRI doing?

SVRI is examining what decolonised funding means to us as a grant making organisation.

SVRI’s Advocacy Toolkit looks at this issue through the lens of who is being funded, what needs to be funded, and how that funding is done:

- *Global Shared Research Agenda*
- *The Tracking Funding Study*
- *Funding Ethically*
These tools together provide a picture of who is being funded, what is being funded, what should be funded and how funding is being done from a perspective of promoting equity, diversity and inclusion.

- Our *Funding Ethically Guidance* lays out **four key principles** and explores how these can be put into practice at all stages of the research process.

“Always assume that is hard to unlearn and interact in a relaxed, open, honest way, unlearning the relationship with who gives you money, and simultaneously questioning *what it means* to be the one who is giving money, and how you expect others to act when you do give them money.”

(FGD researchers, July 2021)
Putting principles into practice!

- Pre-call
- The call
- Submitting the application
- Review of applications

- Post-Award: Developing an understanding
- Implementation
- Closing the project
“Donors need to fund research that meets real needs and does not arise from contexts that are far from reality. Decolonize the approaches of this type of generation of knowledge and practices. Stop seeing low- and middle-income countries as "laboratories" for the production of knowledge. Become true allies and impact people to counter the neoliberal colonial system”

(Respondent from online survey (Spanish), September 2021)

“Consult LMIC researchers in developing grant application procedures and ensure there is sufficient time to apply - they don't have the same capacity to produce large funding applications under difficult circumstances, demand less in terms of personal and institutional capacity and use different metrics to measure the capacity to do the work. If you keep funding the same people who already hold grants and have publications, how is it going to change anything in LMIC settings?”

(Respondent from online survey, September 2021)
What is EQI doing?

- Decolonising Research Practice Project
- Scoping review, lessons learnt paper (externally reviewed), this workshop
- Developing an internal tool for critical self-reflection and project management.
- Dovetails with our Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Action Plan
GROUP ACTIVITY
Group Activity Instructions

You have been asked to bring an example of a VAC/VAWG research project from your own experience.

Spend 5 minutes sharing some of your examples, and decide on one to form a simple case study for your group.

On each table there are 2 different research principles.

Discuss your project, and develop ways to strengthen it in line with the research principles you’ve been assigned, at different levels and phases of the project.

You are welcome to use an example we have developed if you don’t have your own.
If you could go back in time & start the project again, what would you do differently?

Taking a decolonising approach, how would you **practically** strengthen the project against the principles you’ve been assigned? Come up with specific, tangible actions.

What are some of the key challenges to implementing these actions? (e.g., resistance, resources, external pressures, etc.)

How could you mitigate these challenges?
Report back
FINAL REFLECTIONS

Any key takeaways?

Any actions you plan to implement going forward?
Thank you.

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