



# Workshop 9: Ethics and Virtual Methods for Research on Violence Against Women

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# Ethical Challenges of VAWG Measurement

- We don't know how to ask about violence without asking about violence (e.g. [asking community leaders, neighbors](#))
    - Re-traumatization/respondent distress
    - Vicarious trauma
  - Higher costs of research mistakes
    - Extra risks to confidentiality; embarrassment and increased violence
    - Underreporting = impression VAWG is “not a problem”
  - No “truth” to compare our findings to
    - No way to find exact measurements
    - Hard to detect measurement confusion
    - Intervention impacts how people talk about VAWG
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# Why are we discussing remote surveys now?

Background:

- COVID
- Growing use of technology to reach people
- People's ease and comfort with communication remote technology
- Remote VAW surveys are being conducted now



What changes  
when we use  
remote  
instruments?



Safety of  
respondents



Ethics of the  
decision to collect  
and share remote  
data

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# Background sources for this presentation

- Collaboration with World Health Organization to produce remote research guidelines *Recommendations on Ethics and Remote Surveys on Violence against Women*; same structure as the *Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Intervention Research on Violence Against Women*, a previous ethical WHO guidance document, specifically the eight *Putting Women First Recommendation* points
- Outline key ethical and safety issues for consideration when doing quantitative research on violence against women remotely; purpose is tangible guide for ethics

A) The safety of respondents and the research team is paramount and should guide all project decisions.

- Remote research can increase danger to respondents
- Recommendations:

*Prepare for interruptions*

*Assume the presence of potential false respondents or bad-faith actors*

*Consider your technology for the remote survey and outline any features that can be used to improve safety. (See Hessen, et al. table in document for types of remote surveys and risk breakdown)*

*Pre-plan to halt data collection based on violence or privacy breaches.*

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## B) Prevalence and intervention studies need to be methodologically sound and build upon current research experience.

- Remote research has additional risks for bad data being collected
  - Secretly monitored surveys
  - Biases in who is reached, leading to biased conclusions
  - Lack of rapport between respondent and enumerator
  - Recommendations:
    - Technology and its reach are continually advancing*
    - Data quality best practices for remote surveys are continually advancing (see annex for guidelines with detailed steps/learning)*
    - Continue to invest in remote research method improvements*
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# C) Protecting confidentiality is essential to ensure both women's and researcher's safety and data quality

- Maintaining confidentiality is affected by technology

- Considerations:

*Enumerator privacy*

*Enumerator access to appropriate technology*

*Managing the recording of disclosures*

*Server storage and daily communications*



# D) All research team members should be carefully selected and receive specialized training and ongoing support

- VAW enumerators need additional support if working remote
- Considerations for building a team:

*A key element is identifying respondent distress and responding appropriately, which can be more difficult if the enumerator cannot read all the nonverbal cues she may pick up in an in-person interview*

*All enumerators should be trained to respond patiently to all types of stress responses*

*All enumerators should be assessed at the completion of their training (ideally pre-registered)*

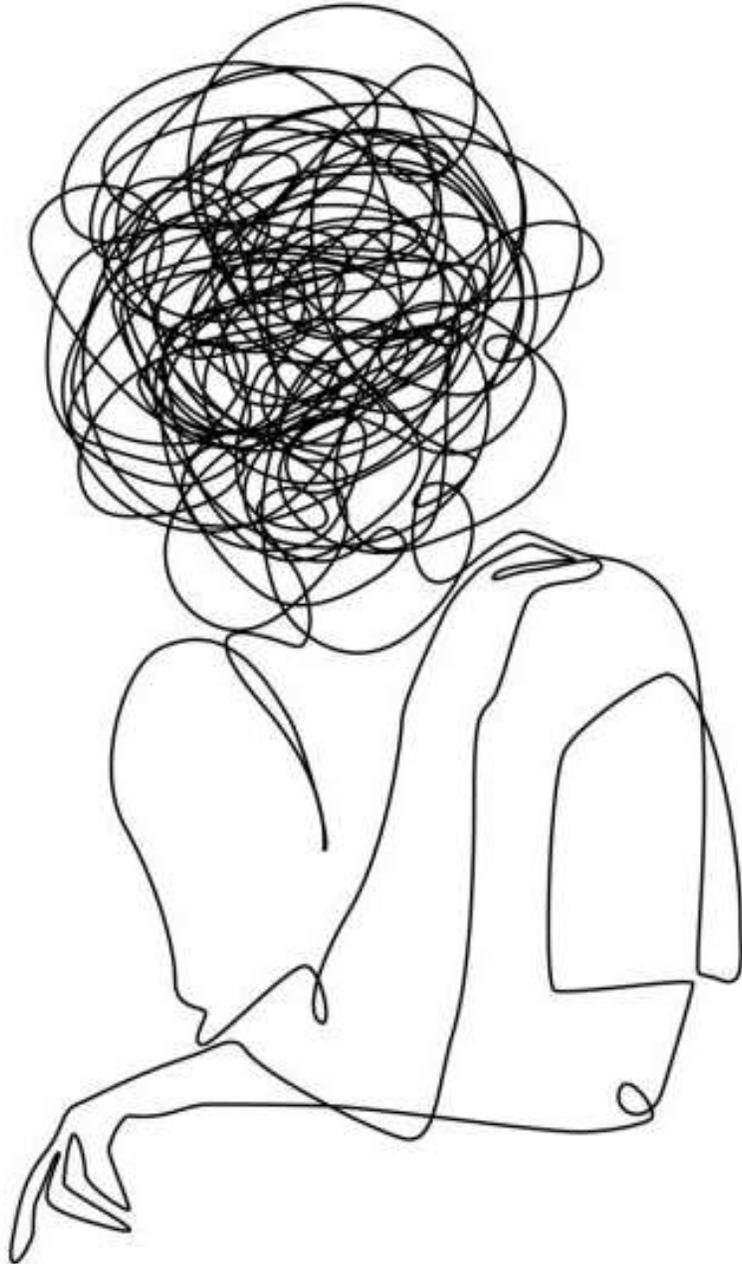
- Recommendations:

*Performance should be based on protocol adherence and respondent care*

*Regular breaks and debriefs, as well as adherence to work-life balance models*

*Training for expectation of survey effects*

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E) The study design must include strategies aimed at reducing potential distress caused to the participants in the research

- Respondent distress/re-traumatization is one of the main costs all VAW researchers consider
- The severity and prevalence of distress caused by VAW interviews remains unclear
- Honoring the comfort and distress of the respondent through “voluntariness”

*Short surveys*

*Ease of skipping/not answering questions*

F) Enumerators should be trained to refer women requesting assistance to available local services and sources of support. Where few resources exist, it may be necessary for the study to create short-term support mechanisms

- Step One: Assessment of available referrals.

*what subjects are covered in the survey*

*how many quality services are available to the respondents, up-to-date, available now (in the situation for the remote survey)*

*How will you share the referral pathway?*

- Long/entire referral pathways
- No referral pathway

*Risks of research*

*Value of research*

- Short or truncated referral pathways

*Capable and available staff who can provide immediate assistance to respondents when contacted.*

*Most able to serve those experiencing the type of violence discussed in the survey.*

*Comprehensive services able to address multiple respondent needs and/or able to connect them to other services.*

*If feasible, requests of the respondent for specific types of care/assistance from the larger list of referrals.*

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G) Researchers have an ethical obligation to ensure their findings are properly interpreted and used to advance policy and intervention development

The research team is responsible for communicating the conclusions that can be drawn from their dataset and those that cannot. For publication, it is recommended to include a short appendix discussing data quality or remote surveying limitations. For other communications with non-researchers, it is important to carefully consider how research findings and key messages are presented. This means tailoring presentations to minimize the likelihood that data and conclusions are wrongly applied.

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H) Violence questions should only be incorporated into surveys designed for other purposes when VAW ethical and methodological requirements can be met

- Are these questions necessary and valuable?
- Evolving Methodologies
- Emergency and extenuating circumstances



# Discussion Points

- What are your experiences with the issues outlined here? Do you have any recommendations for who we should pull into this discussion for background?
  - How to use and present remote data?
  - Possible research for improvements to data quality?
  - Possible research for improvements to respondent safety?
  - Other concerns for safety? Missing parts of this presentation?
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