

HIV Transmission and Treatment Protocol Adherence in Chokwe, Mozambique: A Community Perspective

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Chokwe, Mozambique

The Photovoice project was conducted in Chokwe, Mozambique, a mid-sized town located 4 hours north of the capital, Maputo. Chokwe is located in the Gaza province, which has the highest HIV rate in the country with over 1/3 of the population testing positive. The literacy rate of Mozambique is around 40%. (CIA Factbook)

The national language of Mozambique is Portuguese, and all research activities were conducted in that language. However, the local tribal language, Changana is still the first language of many Mozambicans.

Entry into the Community:

I would like to thank Louise Reina and Hannah Langford for their support and assistance in the completion of this project. Their knowledge and expertise in the region and the connection they have with the Chokwe community allowed the project to be a success.



Placement/Project Information

This project was initiated as a way to gain real world experience in Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR). It replaced the SW 522 research requirement. The procedure involved completing a Photovoice project with around 10 peer educators in Chokwe Mozambique, asking the question, "What challenges does the community face with HIV treatment protocol adherence?". The educators used images to describe difficulties in their own work and for individuals in the community, which were often the same or similar. The main barriers identified for educators and community members were economic and cultural (stigma).

Agency/Community Partner

While I had no official community partner agency, I was lucky enough to have associates in the Peace Corps on whom I could rely for pre-departure planning and assistance entering the community. The population with which I worked consisted of HIV positive community educators located at the Hospital Rural de Chokwe.. All 8 Photovoice participants were women ranging in age from early 20's to middle 50's.

Outcomes

There were several outcomes for this project. The most important are the benefits to the community. The peer educators learned to use images to help teach community members about modes of transmission and the importance of treatment protocol adherence. Second the women saw the economic need to become their own association and will hopefully be pursuing that process. Finally, while presenting to hospital staff, the educators were thanked for their work on behalf of the community. Less important outcomes are the paper I will complete for SW 522 and this poster.

Skills Utilized/Developed

1. Group facilitation skills
2. Community organizing
3. Project Management
4. Fundraising
5. Advocacy

...And the list goes on...

Classroom Connections

Once I began working with the 8 peer educators in Chokwe, it became clear that I could have conducted any number of studies based on this experience. In particular, I could have completed a practicum of group social work based on the foundation of SW 624 with Dr. Ortega. Community organization was also a large part of this project and therefore I utilized skills learned in 647/697 with Dr. Gant.

Lessons Learned

In addition to the results of the research, there were many valuable personal and professional lessons learned in the completion of this project. As part of my larger body of work abroad, the lessons were not new in every case, but rather reminders of the basics: be humble, respectful and consistent. Professionally this opportunity provided me with some of my first experiences with project management, and catalyzed an interest in learning Portuguese. This was also my first experience working with the HIV positive population or doing advocacy for that group. Academically, it gave me a taste of research procedure and IRB review. As I anticipated, my time in Mozambique was so rich with lessons, I am still processing and integrating them into my professional persona and practice.

Career Connections

I have a strong interest in international social work practice and international development. Therefore this experience is another step on my path to an international career. I also believe adamantly in the universality of the lessons learned. While the place is distinct, and the community demographically distinct from our own, the lessons of respect in community practice and the omnipotence of economic concern are applicable everywhere.

Advice

Make sure you have a reliable community gate keeper.

Don't be afraid to laugh at your mistakes, but never let yourself be ignorant about the place or population.

Be respectful. Acknowledge your place in the world, with all its privilege and ignorance.

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