

Developing qualitative research with black and minority ethnic populations



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Background



Researching sensitive issues with African populations in the UK

Today's talk will draw on examples of from studies...

- Exploring ethnicity and sexual health
- Feasibility of extending the Health Survey for England
- Stopping stigma with Awaradressers
- MAYISHA - II

Aims of this talk

- **Why qualitative methods need to be adapted and strengthened**
- **Implications for design, recruitment, interviewing, analysis, reporting and reliability and validity**
- **Examples of strategies developed**
- **Discussion**

Why do we need to develop qualitative methods

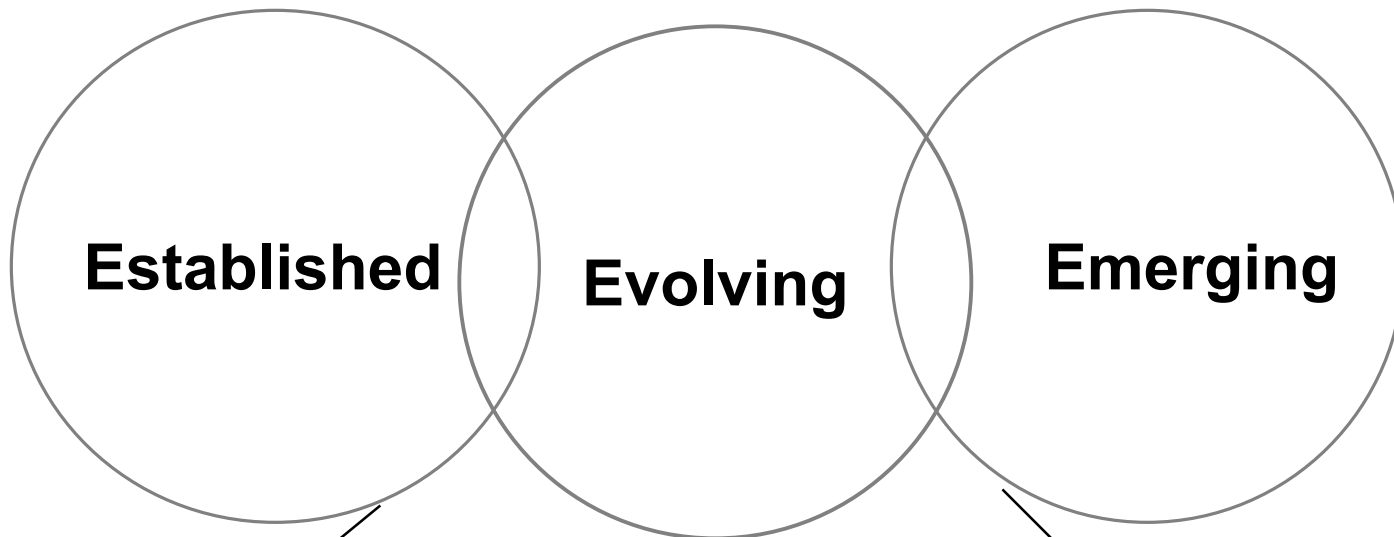
Shouldn't good qualitative research methodology meet the challenges of most populations e.g.

- Provides explanations of social phenomena in terms of experiences and understanding of individuals
- Based on direct experience of the phenomena
- Purposive sampling ensures inclusion of relevant population members
- Interviews comprise open questions that are grounded in language and concepts of participants
- Qualitative methods are inductive, not hypothesis driven
 - Build hypothesis from participants' accounts
 - Use observations to formulate ideas
 - Theories emerge from analysis of verbatim accounts

Why we need to adapt methods

- **Language needs**
- **Different ways of story telling**
- **Vulnerability of the population**
 - Stigma and discrimination
 - Power imbalance
- **Diversity in the population e.g.**
 - Mobility
 - Household composition
 - Economic circumstances

Sample design needs to reflect diverse characteristics of population sub-groups



Voluntary migration

Strong community networks

Fleeing

Weaker support networks



Implications for research design

Research design needs to reflect diversity in:

- **Circumstances**

e.g. Migration, employment, income, status...

- **Identity - 'African' or 'black African' not representative of all**

e.g. British, Muslim, Arabic, European, North African...

- **Change in the population**

e.g. Origins, location, identity, circumstances, treatment, rights, access...

Implications for research conduct



•Set up

- Consent procedures and ethics that meet needs of vulnerable groups

•Interviews

- Language skills

- Conduct and pacing

- Heightened sensitivity

•Sample design

- Population awareness

- Multiple strategies to ensure inclusion



Designs need to include...

- Time to build trust and confidence
- Techniques to ensure population familiarisation
- Participatory methods



Collaborative approach

- **Must be initiated before the project begins**
- **Include community representatives with:**
 - Population perspective
 - Familiarity with research
 - Respect values of the study population
- **Include capacity for review and challenge of the research process**



Value of community groups

- **Range of specialist perspectives**
- **Breadth of experience**
- **Work closely with hard to reach groups**
- **Up-to-date information on local population**
- **Expertise in techniques for increasing participation**
- **Potential source of recruitment for co-researchers and interviewers**

Barriers to collaboration with community groups

- **High turnover of organisations**

- Up-to-date listings inaccurate

- **Many organisations run by volunteers**

- Run from home

- Alongside other work / family commitments

- Poorly resourced

- Need support and resources to facilitate collaboration

- **Generally keen to be involved, but...**

- Research not always a priority



Adapt research ethics to reflect population needs e.g.

- **Avoid over-burdening community organisations and representatives**
- **Seek community approval**
 - Negotiate terms scope and benefits
- **Agree community ownership and publication**
- **Employ community members**
- **Build capacity in social research skills**

Sample selection and recruitment



- **Multiple recruitment strategies to reflect population diversity**
- **Consultation on best approaches**
- **Draw on community expertise in outreach work**
- **Employ community recruiters to help overcome:**
 - Distrust
 - Stigma
 - And ensure appropriate consent procedures



Conduct of interviews

•Appropriate language essential

- Vocabulary
- Confidence
- Concepts and definitions
- Pacing

•Comfort

- Agree environment and location of the interview with respondent
- Ensure interviewer is comfortable with language needed for sensitive topics



Advantages of ethnically matched interviewers

- **Greater potential to understand and empathise with respondents**
- **Shared language and cultural references**
- **Cultural knowledge of how and why sensitivity arises**
- **Able to negotiate language and concepts**
- **Appropriate behaviour**
- **Immediacy of reactions**



Respondent expectations of matched interviewers

- **Belief that interviewer will be less judgemental**
- **Increased trust**
- **Greater understanding of cultural values and norms**
- **Community interests at heart**

Disadvantages of matched interviewers



- **Assumes discordant ethnic backgrounds are main barrier**
 - Overlooks gender, age, social status, internal stratifications
- **Respondents may find it hard to criticise cultural norms**
- **Or reluctant to admit to deviance from community values or practices**
- **Cultural knowledge assumed of interviewer can lead to...**
 - Under-reporting and lack of explanation
- **Interviewer may seem over familiar**
- **Assumptions about respondent's identity**
- **Interviewer burden**



Advantages of non-matched interviewers

- **Anonymity and confidentiality**
- **Seem less judgemental**
- **Provide a more neutral interviewing space**
- **Interviewers never completely 'non-matched'**

Analysis and reporting



- **Continue collaborative working**
- **Accessible data and analysis strategies**
- **Community review**
 - Focus / panel group feedback
 - Commentary
 - Independent / peer review
- **Anticipate and assess sensitive topics**
 - Agree dissemination strategy
 - Meet information needs and avoid stigmatisation

Generalisability based on...

•Achieving diversity and range

- Awareness of limits of the sample structure
- Monitor for missing constituents

•Quality of accounts

- Depth of explanation
- Range of behaviours, attitudes, experiences...
- Cross-section of comfort levels with topic



Future challenges

- **Time and resources**
- **Continued stigmatisation**
- **Improving collaborative models**
- **Capacity building**
 - Research
 - Collaboration
- **Role of African HIV Research Forum**
 - Opportunities to discuss how we carry out and conduct research and evaluation
 - Source of advice and technical guidance
 - Opportunities to share experiences of HIV-related research
 - Newsletters and reports to disseminate research findings and good practice

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