Conducting Research Together with Remote Aboriginal Communities

Presented in partnership:
Annette Kogolo, Leo Thirkall, Marilyn Oscar
and Emily Fitzpatrick

Photo: Kimberley Boab at Dawn
Connected to Country...

Photo: Karningarra Walmajarri Country, Canning Stock Route
My father’s country is Pirlurl, on the Great Sandy Desert

Photo: Purluwala Jila, Great Sandy Desert

Jila ngapa is living water.

Photo: Annette Kogolo
Leo Thirkall

Photo: Annette Kogolo
Leo Thirkall
Connected to Country...

Marilyn Oscar

Photo: Windjana Gorge, Bunuba Country
Research with Indigenous People

- 370 million Indigenous people in the world
- 90 countries
- Marginalisation > Health and well being

- “Subjects” of research in “colonised” countries
  - Rarely benefitted the people

- How far have we come?
  
  The “language of inequality” is still used today...

  (L.T.Smith)
Seeking consent for research with Indigenous communities: A Systematic Review

Fitzpatrick E, Martiniuk AM, D’Antoine H, Oscar J, Carter M, Elliott E

- PRISMA Guidelines
- Full text articles reviewed n=352
- Articles included n=56
- Evaluate the consent process n=5
- Describe the consent process in some detail n=13
- Guidelines reviewed n=38
Table 2. Evaluation of Current Guidelines for Seeking Consent for Research with Indigenous Populations

- Local languages
- Visual Aides
- Local Advice
Key Findings

- Few studies describe the process of seeking consent with Indigenous populations in detail.

- Even fewer evaluate the preference or understanding of information presented.

- Guidelines highlight values important to uphold but fail to specify how these are translated into practice when seeking consent.

- External researchers need to reflect on how they engage with Indigenous communities in order to do research in a culturally respectful way.
The Picture Talk Project:
Starting a Conversation with Community Leaders
on Research with Remote
Aboriginal Communities of Australia

Fitzpatrick E, MacDonald G, Martiniuk A, D’Antoine H,
Oscar J, Lawford T, Carter M, Elliott E
The Picture Talk Project

- Invited by Aboriginal Leaders
- Reflecting on research processes
- Collaboration with community
- Local researchers – cultural guidance
- Qualitative research
- NVivo10 inductive/deductive coding with grounded theory, validated locally
- COREQ guidelines
The Fitzroy Valley

- Population 4500
- 95% Aboriginal
- 4 main language groups
- Fitzroy Crossing –main town
- Remote communities hundreds of kilometers on open road
- Cut off *annually* by flooding in
- “Wet Season” December - March
Aboriginal Community Leaders of the Fitzroy Valley invited researchers from Darwin and Sydney to work in partnership.
Working Together on Country

[Map of the region showing language groups]

Source: Based on Nindilingarri Cultural Health Services map.

[Logo of Marninwarntikura Women's Resource Centre]

[Logo of Kimberly Aboriginal Law & Cultural Centre (KALACC)]
4 Main Language Groups in the Fitzroy Valley

Bunuba

Gooniyandi

Wangkatjungka

Walmajarri
Methods

• Interviews with leaders and focus groups with community members about understanding and experiences with research and the consent process.

• With consent, interviews were either written at the time or voice recorded and later transcribed to be analysed by NVivo10 Qualitative Software.
1. Research: Finding Knowledge

“In the past I don’t think people who were doing the research felt they had to consult with Aboriginal people... When you think of researchers... going on for years on Aboriginal people. We’re the most researched group in this country and yet nothing’s changed.

I believe that if you’re going to do research we should see changes or we should benefit you know.” (P17)
Recommendation 1:

Research protocols and ethical guidelines for research with remote Aboriginal communities should require research funding bodies and external researchers to:

Be responsive to the research needs identified by the communities
2. Working Together with Good Communication

I don’t think researchers should do research with any Aboriginal people unless they’ve engaged fully with the Aboriginal people from the start to the end (P17)
Recommendation 2:

Research protocols and ethical guidelines for research with remote Aboriginal communities should:

Require external researchers to collaborate with a nominated representative of the Aboriginal community who holds local respect and has strong cultural knowledge, and the right person for the right area.

This Aboriginal research partner should inform the research project from the protocol design to completion of the project and delivery of results.
Collaborating Together

Photo: Collaborative Artwork from 4 main Language Groups, Mangkaja Art Gallery
3. Being flexible with time

“If you want to do research, you can’t just set a timeframe because you’ve got to be respectful of what’s happening around you” (P20)

“Those people on the sorry side, you’ve got to pay respect to them, don’t get them involved with anything.” (P8)
Recommendation 3

Research protocols and ethical guidelines for research with remote Aboriginal communities should:

Require funding bodies to be more flexible in their timelines allowing for unexpected cultural obligations.
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