

Participatory Research



Coproduction of Knowledge Research as Inclusive Research

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Abstract

An increased use of the participatory research (PR) approach in health and social sciences has been witnessed in recent years. PR brings forth local knowledge and action that can uniquely help to address social and health issues of the community of interest. It, however, has raised many challenges to the practice of so-called scientific research. PR has asked crucial questions about the construction and use of knowledge and the importance of power relations which permeate the research process. PR challenges the role of the researchers in engaging with a community who is the focus of the research, and the capacity of the two partners to make society more just and equitable. PR is a distinctive form of social research that is linked with social transformation among socially excluded individuals and marginalized and oppressed societies. PR aims to scrutinize the political structures that disempower deprived, marginalized, and oppressed groups of people and to find ways in which these structures can be altered for the better. This chapter emphasizes what is referred to as "collective testimonies," people work

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© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2022 P. Liamputtong (ed.), *Handbook of Social Inclusion*, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-89594-5_25 together with others (the researchers), to resist oppression, colonization, and marginalization, and find ways to improve their lives and situations. In particular, the chapter will focus on the methodology of participatory action research (PAR), the community-based participatory research (CBPR), and the photovoice method.

Keywords

Participatory research · Coproduction of knowledge · Participatory action research · Community-based participatory research · Photovoice · Marginalized people · Oppression

1 Introduction

In the past few decades, an increased use of the participatory research (PR) approach in health and social sciences has been witnessed (Reason and Bradbury 2006a, b, 2008; Higginbottom and Liamputtong 2015; Rowell et al. 2017; Bradbury-Jones et al. 2018; Wright and Kongats 2018; Abma et al. 2019). PR has also been coined as "collaborative inquiry" (Trickett and Espino 2004). PR refers to "an *approach*" to research that perceives research as "a relational process through which new knowledge is produced collectively rather than by an individual on their own" (Abma et al. 2019, p. 7). Arguably, PR brings forth local knowledge and action that can uniquely help to address social and health issues of the community of interest.

PR has raised many challenges to the practice of so-called scientific research (Santos 2014; Wallerstein and Duran 2017; Chevalier and Buckles 2019). PR practitioners question the use of positivism arguing that this scientific inquiry dismisses the "experiential knowledge" of individuals. It instead emphasizes the passivity of research participants and hence suppresses their voices (Wallerstein and Duran 2017). Although it is useful, positivism "thwarts the field's interests in alleviating suffering and promoting social justice" (Buchanan 1998, p. 440).

Additionally, PR has asked crucial questions about the construction and use of knowledge and the importance of power relations which permeate the research process. PR challenges the role of the researchers in engaging with a community or local people who are the focus of the research, and the capacity of the two partners to make society more just and equitable (Wallerstein et al. 2017; Abma et al. 2019). Researching within this framework necessitates the use of research methodologies which "go beyond the 'mere involvement' of those whose experiences are being researched to allow for their 'responsible agency in the production of knowledge" (Salmon 2007, p. 983). This will significantly decrease the "risk of co-option and exploitation of people in the realization of the plans of others" (McTaggart 1997, pp. 28–29). It is argued that through collaboration between researchers and research participants, social inclusion among people can be achieved, as they are able to meaningfully participate in the research. The approach encourages people to take action that can also lead to empowerment (Lawson 2015a, b).

It has been suggested elsewhere that participatory research (PR) is a distinctive form of social research that is linked with social transformation among socially excluded individuals and marginalized and oppressed societies (▶ Chap. 17, "Qualitative Inquiry and Inclusive Research" see also Higginbottom and Liamputtong 2015; Burns 2018; Abma et al. 2019; Eckhoff 2019). PR aims to scrutinize the political structures that disempower deprived, marginalized, and oppressed groups of people and to find ways in which these structures can be altered for the better (Brydon-Miller et al. 2011; Lykes and Crosby 2014; Higginbottom and Liamputtong 2015; Lawson 2015a, b; Bradbury-Jones et al. 2018; Abma et al. 2019). As such, PR attempts to cultivate new forms of knowledge through a creative synthesis of the different understandings and experiences of people who take part in the research. Since this knowledge is created from the point of view of deprived, marginalized, and oppressed groups, it aims to transform the "social realities" of these people.

PR legitimizes "the right to research" among socially excluded people (Burns 2018; Abma et al. 2019; Eckhoff 2019). These individuals have an opportunity to acquire new knowledge and skills through their participation in research; this helps to empower them and enable them to take control of their life. It prevents marginalized people from becoming passive objects who have research "done on them," because they can have equal power in contributing in the research. Through this empowerment and emancipation, inequalities and injustices in health and social care can be reduced or eradicated.

This chapter emphasizes what is referred to as "collective testimonies of people" within a collaborative effort (Liamputtong 2010). That is, through "collective testimonies," people work together with others (the researchers), to resist oppression, colonization, and marginalization, and find ways to improve their lives and situations. In particular, the chapter will focus on the methodology of participatory action research (PAR), the community-based participatory research (CBPR), and the photovoice method.

2 Participatory Action Research (PAR)

PAR embodies the principle of collaboration between researchers and participants as equal partners seeking the goal of creating positive change. PAR has been shown to be highly effective in engaging participants in the research process and in empowering them to influence the research process in a manner that allows them to have their voices heard, their needs addressed, and research outcomes used to their benefit. (Johnson et al. 2018, p. 45)

Following the theoretical framework established by Paulo Freire (2000 [1970]), the main goal of participatory action research (PAR) is to result in "a more just society through transformative social change" (Kwok and Ku 2008, p. 266). Within the PAR approach, research is not perceived to be only "a process of creating knowledge" but is also seen as "a process of education, development of consciousness, and mobilization for action" (Kwok and Ku 2008, p. 266). PAR, as Park (2006, p. 83) contends, is "action-oriented research activity" that allows ordinary people to address common concerns that occur in their daily lives, and in the process of this participation, they also generate knowledge.

PAR is not a research method nor a theory. Rather, it is a research approach that Lawson (2015a, p. ix) refers to as "a special investigative methodology," and what Rowell et al. (2017, p. 6) have coined as a "big tent." According to Chevalier and Buckles (2019, p. 3), PAR "promotes pluralism and creativity in the art of discovering the world and making it better at the same time." As a research methodology, PAR "accommodates a broad spectrum of theoretical orientations and methods."

The central frame of participatory action research is that the research begins with the problems that people face and then they participate in the research process as fully as possible (Park 2006; Reason and Bradbury 2006a, b, 2008; Burns 2018; Abma et al. 2019). The research participants are full partners in the research process and are treated as coresearchers. Together with the researchers, they became involved in the research cycle to find solutions for their problems. As Reason and Bradbury (2006b, p. 1) contend, PAR is an "inquiry and participation in search of a world worthy of human aspiration." Participatory action research (PAR) pursues to reinforce empowerment and social justice as well as relocate power in the research process to research participants. It is a research approach that is "done *with*, rather than on," research participants (Tanabe et al. 2018, p. 282). It blends action and reflection in a continual sequel.

PAR is also a social practice which assists marginalized people to acquire "a degree of emancipation as autonomous and responsible members of society" (Park 2006, p. 83). To Park, PAR can be referred to as "research of the people, by the people, and for the people." The ultimate goal of PAR is to "bring about changes by improving the material circumstances of affected people" (p. 84). Researchers adopting this methodological approach clearly aim to work collaboratively with people who have traditionally been oppressed and exploited. Collectively, fundamental social changes can be achieved through PAR (Brydon-Miller 2001; Burns 2018; Johnson et al. 2018; Abma et al. 2019).

PAR arises from two research approaches namely action research (AR) and participatory research (PR) (Thiollent and Colette 2017). PR's philosophy is grounded in the power of emancipation derived from the "Southern tradition" of research (Wallerstein and Duran 2017). The original work was associated with oppressed peoples in less developing societies (see Fals Borda 2006; Swantz et al. 2006; Thiollent and Colette 2017). The aim of PR is "structural transformation" (Khanlou and Peter 2005, p. 2334), and its target groups include "exploited or oppressed groups" such as marginalized, ethnic minority groups and Indigenous peoples.

PAR commits to producing "the political nature of knowledge" and emphasizes "a premium on self-emancipation" (Esposito and Murphy 2000, p. 180). Therefore, PAR is ideally an approach used with and for marginalized people and those groups in cross-cultural settings. Johnson et al. (2018, p. 45) argue that

PAR is particularly effective in empowering communities that are disempowered, suffer from health and healthcare disparities, are undereducated or underemployed, are closed, and have a history of having been abused in prior research efforts.

According to Park (1993, p. 15), PAR accommodates "space for the oppressed to use their intellectual power to be critical and innovative in order to fashion a world free of domination and exploitation." Therefore, great care is needed to ensure that these

marginalized participants will benefit from the research and not be further exploited or vulnerable. The ideals of PAR are that the participants who are directly involved in the research should be benefited (see Arcaya et al. 2018; Esienumoh et al. 2018; Graca et al. 2018; Johnson et al. 2018; Kiser and Hulton 2018; Kong 2018; Tanabe et al. 2018; Forbes-Genade and van Niekerk 2019; Karlsson et al. 2019).

PAR emerges deliberately as a means for resisting traditional research practices which are seen by some cultural groups as "acts of colonization" when research aims and policy agendas are imposed on a community and far removed from their concerns or needs (Kemmis and McTaggart 2008, Kemmis et al. 2014; McTaggart et al. 2017). In PAR, community members are the experts in their own lives. They should be actively involved in making decisions, planning the research, and implementing and reviewing changes. As such, this research is not isolated from their everyday experiences, as is often the case with conventional research carried out solely by external researchers (McTaggart et al. 2017). Kemmis et al. (2014, p. 20) state the following:

At its best then, critical participatory action research is a social process of collaborative learning for the sake of individual and collective self-formation, realised by groups of people who join together in changing the practices through which they interact in a shared social world.

PAR allows community members and the researchers to have their "freedom to explore and to recreate" (Fals Borda 1991, p. 149). Through PAR, the participants and the researchers work collaboratively to find new knowledge and practical solutions to end their problems. It commits to "the principle of autonomy and ownership in collective research" (dé Ishtar 2005, p. 364). The Indigenous self-determination (PAR) carried out by Zohl dé Ishtar (2005), for example, has resulted in the establishment of the Kapululangu Women's Law and Culture Centre in the Great Sandy Desert in Western Australia.

PAR is thus an appropriate research approach for working with Indigenous people and in cross-cultural research where the researched participants are extremely oppressed by structural violence. Based on the same epistemological perspective of PAR, Kaupapa Mãori research methodology has emerged (Smith 2006, 2008, 2014). Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2014, p. 183) asserts that Kaupapa Mãori research allows the researched and the researchers to be able to work together in order to set strategies for "the priorities, policies, and practices of research for, by, and with Mãori." Through emancipation, Kaupapa Mãori research permits oppressed, silenced, and marginalized groups such as the Mãori to have more control of their own lives and their community (Smith 2006, 2008, 2014; Liamputtong 2010; ▶ Chap. 17, "Qualitative Inquiry and Inclusive Research").

3 Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR)

CBPR turns upside down the more traditional applied research paradigm, in which the outside researcher largely has determined the questions asked, the research tools employed, the interventions developed, and the kinds of outcomes documented and valued. (Wallerstein et al. 2017, p. 2)

Community-based participatory research (CBPR) is an emerging research approach which equally involves the community such as community members, agency representatives and organization, and the researchers in all facets of the research process (Israel et al. 2005, 2013; Lawson 2015a, b; Coughlin et al. 2017; Wallerstein et al. 2017; Collins et al. 2018; Tremblay et al. 2018; Willson 2019). CBPR empowers community groups to collaborate in research to appreciate and address the complex social, cultural, political, and structural factors impacting the lives of individuals and their communities (Lawson 2015a, b; Tremblay et al. 2018; Willson 2019). CBPR aims to merge action and knowledge to "create positive and lasting social change" (Collins et al. 2018, p. 884). Increasingly, researchers are pulled to CBPR for research that appreciates community participation to rectify health inequality issues arising from social disadvantage (Willson 2019).

At its essence, CBPR examines the "power relationships" that are intrinsically ingrained in the production of Western knowledge (Tremblay et al. 2018, p. 2). CBPR encourages a share of power between the researcher and the research participants. Importantly, it acknowledges the authority of experiential knowledge and encourages research that aims at bettering practices and situations of people.

Essentially, the CBPR comprises salient characteristics as illustrated in Fig. 1.

CBPR is particularly valuable when working with marginalized individuals as the approach promotes the sharing of control over the health and social conditions of these individuals as well as the installation of respectful relationships with them (Tremblay et al. 2018; see also Xia et al. 2016; Greenwood 2017; Vaughn and Jacquez 2017; Collins et al. 2018; Graca et al. 2018; Kiser and Hulton 2018; Katz-Wise et al. 2019). According to Katz-Wise et al. (2019), undertaking CBPR with

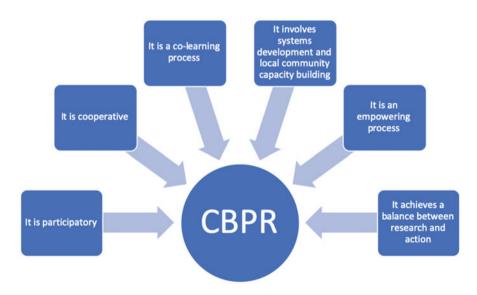


Fig. 1 Characteristics of CBPR. (Adopted from Israel et al. 2013)

marginalized people can help empower them to share their voices, as well as inform more effective health and social care programs that best serve their needs.

In the health sciences, CBPR has become essential in the fields of public health, nursing, and medicine (Collins et al. 2018). CBPR is well suited for addressing health disparities and inequities in socially disadvantaged, stigmatized, and marginalized people. Rather than focusing on the health problems of people, CBPR emphasizes their resources, opportunities, and resilience for positive advancement (Coughlin et al. 2017; Israel et al. 2017; Kiser and Hulton 2018; Willson 2019). Additionally, CBPR is a promising research approach that can help to implement socially just and culturally appropriate health and social care to marginalized people (Collins et al. 2018).

In their CBPR research with Arab American's perceptions of health and health care utilization, Leh and Saoud (2020, p. 449) suggest that a CBPR approach permitted "the inclusion of an active voice to this select Arab American community." Their study provided extraordinary knowledge about the sociocultural factors that impact understandings of health, health care access, and health care utilization of Arab Americans. They suggest that their study findings yielded fruitful information that can inform health promotion strategies. In particular, the results can "guide the development of culturally congruent community-based interventions aimed at reducing disparities associated with accessing the health care system" (Leh and Saoud 2020, p. 449).

CBPR has been used extensively in research involving Indigenous peoples (see Mohatt and Thomas 2006; Bell et al. 2016; de Leeuw 2017; Dunleavy et al. 2018; Kyoon-Achan et al. 2018). For example, the People Awakening project (PA) was constructed as collaborative research between Alaska Native community members and university researchers (Mohatt and Thomas 2006). Using an approach grounded within an Alaska Native cultural worldview and over 4 years, the project was developed to examine possible protective and resilient factors among Alaska Natives who have recovered from, or do not abuse, alcohol. The community-focused approach adopted in this study, as Mohatt and Thomas (2006, p. 97) point out, "moved away from interacting with participants as objects of representational knowledge to building equal community-investigator partnerships working together to shape and construct the research questions, methods, interpretations, and conclusions. This collaborative process imbues knowledge (or results) with the meanings ascribed to these results by the participants." The project was built on the framework that Paulo Freire (2000 [1970]) refers to as "conscientization," where knowledge is generated through "a process of empowering communities" and acts as an "emancipator" (Fals Borda 2001).

4 The Photovoice Method

In PR, often researchers make use of more inclusive means to engage with their participants. According to Park (2006, p. 84), the use of the inclusive research approach, such as art, photography, theatre, storytelling, music, dance, and other

expressive media, is essential to "reveal the more submerged and difficult-to-articulate aspects of the issues involved." Thus, PR researchers have used community meetings and different types of community events, such as theatre, storytelling, puppets, song, drawing, and painting, as well as educational camps, as means of gathering data among marginalized people (Brydon-Miller 2001; Wallerstein and Duran 2017). Many of these so-called "unconventional" (but more inclusive research) methods employed in PR are essential if researchers wish to offer people the chance to fully participate (see D'Amico et al. 2016; Wallerstein and Duran 2017; Jarldorn 2019; Lee et al. 2019; Oliveira 2019; Ramji et al. 2020; ► Chap. 17, "Qualitative Inquiry and Inclusive Research"). Salazar (1991) argues that it is crucial for "oppressed" people to be able to find a way to tell their stories, and this may help them to break "culture of silence" resulting from centuries of oppression.

Particularly within the CBPR, the photovoice method has emerged as a creative and inclusive means of working with marginalized people. The photovoice method rejects traditional paradigms of power and the production of knowledge within the research relationship (Jarldom 2019; Lee et al. 2019; Teti et al. 2019; Loignon et al. 2020; Teti and Wyk 2020). The researchers are more concerned about developing critical consciousness and empowerment among their research participants. The photovoice method, thus, tends to be used in participatory and collaborative research.

The photovoice method allows research participants to record and reflect the concerns and needs of their community via taking photographs. It also promotes critical discussion about important issues through the dialogue about photographs they have taken. The concerns of research participants may reach policy-makers through public forums and the display of their photographs. By using a camera to record their concerns and needs, it permits individuals who rarely have contact with those who make decisions over their lives, to make their voices heard (Jarldorn 2019; Lee et al. 2019; Teti et al. 2019; Loignon et al. 2020; Teti and Wyk 2020).

Photovoice is based on Paulo Freire's (2000 [1970]) approach to critical education, and a participatory approach to documentary photography. The educational praxis that Freire advocates emphasizes that people speak from their own experience and share with others. It requires people to identify historical and social patterns that oppress their individual lives. This allows people to be able to critically examine the issues from their root causes and to find strategies to change their situations and lives. Freire stresses the power of visual images as a vehicle to assist individuals to think critically about the forces and factors which have a great impact on their lives. Photovoice emerges from this philosophy and "builds on a commitment to social and intellectual change through community members' critical production and analysis of the visual image" (Wang and Pies 2008, pp. 184–185; see also Kingery et al. 2016; Ronzi et al. 2016; Mark and Boulton 2017; Bryanton et al. 2019; Jarldorn 2019; Lee et al. 2019; Teti et al. 2019; Loignon et al. 2020; Teti and Wyk 2020).

The photovoice method is also based on feminist research (Wang 1999; Wang and Pies 2008; Jarldorn 2019; Lee et al. 2019). As Wang and Pies (2008, p. 185) write, "feminist theory suggests that power accrues to those who have a voice, set language, make history, and participate in decisions." Based on the feminist framework, photovoice practice advocates that individuals can use this approach "to influence

how their public presence is defined." The photovoice methodology allows individuals to use "photography as a community voice to reach policymakers." As such, the methodology moves "beyond the personal voice to the political."

Photovoice was originally developed by Wang (1999) to enable village women in China to photograph their health experiences and was able to transform their health outcomes. The method was used as an empowerment tool for the women who lived in a poor, mountainous, and remote area in southwestern China. Through the photos and group discussions, the women explored their daily interactions. The women identified reproductive health as their main concern, and this became the focus of their photovoice project (see Wang et al. 1996; Wang and Burris 1997).

In other projects in China, Wang et al. (1996) also adopted photovoice as their methodology. Women were given cameras to take photographs of their lives; they became the "native photographers." The photographs were then used by the women to articulate their needs from their own viewpoints. Through their participation in this photovoice project, they owned the photographs they had taken, and through dialogue, discussion, and storytelling, the women were able to engage with policy-makers and planners, granting empowerment among Chinese women in the study.

Methodologically, photovoice requires the participants to take photographs that represent their understanding and meanings of life. The photographs are then used as the basis for discussions in later interviews, which often occur in group settings. The discussion of the photographs permits the participants to articulate the understanding and interpretations of their images they have taken (Jarldorn 2019; Lee et al. 2019; Teti et al. 2019; Loignon et al. 2020; Teti and Wyk 2020). The aims of the photovoice method are presented in Fig. 2.

In practice, the photovoice method requires research participants to perform a few tasks:

- Taking part in an informational training session, to receive a camera and determine the topic for their first photo assignment.
- Taking photographs to record the realities of their experiences for each photo assignment.
- Participating in group discussion sessions to share their photographs from each photo assignment and to examine the issue and discuss potential strategies for change. According to Wang (1999), participants follow the SHOWED framework to guide the discussion of their photographs. This includes the following questions: What do you See in this photograph? What is Happening in the photograph? How does this relate to Our lives? Why do these issues exist? How can we become Empowered by our new social understanding? What can we Do to address these issues? (López et al. 2005; Liamputtong 2010; Jarldorn 2019).
- Organizing a forum and exhibition to present their photographs and stories to local policymakers and service providers whom they have identified as potential collaborators who could influence positive changes (Streng et al. 2004, p. 405).

Earlier photovoice projects have suggested that the participants benefit personally and collectively. For example, in the Language of Light photovoice project (Wang

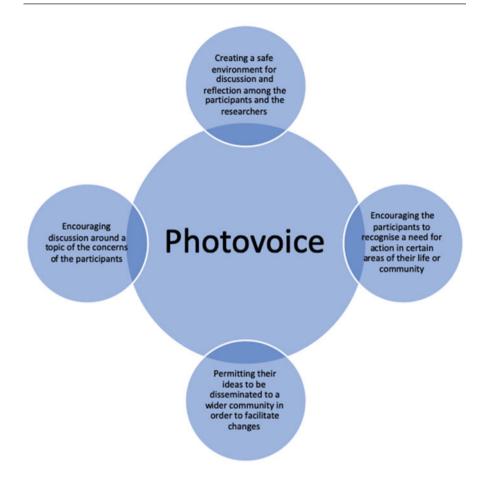


Fig. 2 Aims of the photovoice method (Source: Carlson et al. 2006)

2003), both women and men suggested that their participation in the project promoted self-esteem and enhanced their quality of life and status with their peers. Their participants said that they enjoyed the creative process of the method and the attention they received from the researchers, policymakers, and the media. One 60-year-old woman put up her camera and announced: "This is history!" (Wang 2003, p. 187).

Recently, more adoption of the photovoice method in CBPR research as well as research involving with marginalized people have been witnessed (see Kingery et al. 2016; Ronzi et al. 2016; Mark and Boulton 2017; Bryanton et al. 2019; Jarldorn 2019; Lee et al. 2019; Loignon et al. 2020; Michalek et al. 2020; Ussher et al. 2020). In their research regarding sexual violence among transwomen of color in Australia, Ussher et al. (2020) used the photovoice method as a means for the women to share their everyday experiences of sexual violence. The women used their own smartphones to take photographs and submitted them to the research team

electronically. The photographs were used as the basis for discussion in a follow-up interview conducted with the initial interviewer, which focused on the meaning of the images participants had provided. At the end of the photovoice project, the research team organized an exhibition to disseminate the photographs taken by the participants. Due to the coronavirus pandemic in Australia, the exhibition was changed to a virtual exhibition to reach wider audiences (see https://www.crossingtheline.online/crossing-the-line-report). This study reaffirms the strength of the photovoice method as inclusive research that gives voice to a group of socially excluded and vulnerable women as well as cultivates empowerment among the transwomen of color in the study.

In Loignon et al.'s study (2020), The EQUIhealThY project (a PR project using the photovoice method) was established in partnership with an international community organization working to provide access to healthcare and overcome poverty. According to Loignon et al. (2020, p. 2), photovoice confirms that it is a "transformative method" that can benefit both academic and nonacademic researchers, and lead to changes in the local setting. Their research promoted practices for embracing the experiential knowledge of individuals living in poverty "when seeking solutions to provide more equity in the healthcare system." This project emphasizes the relevance of the coproduction of healthcare. Loignon et al. (2020, p. 15) contend that this coproduction is essential when "healthcare services are becoming more and more expensive and where health inequalities and discrimination prevent people from taking full advantage of the health and social services system." Their research shows the importance of collaboration between people who are living in poverty and those who provide healthcare to them, as well as "the production of knowledge attempting to destigmatize poverty and the people living in this condition" (p. 15).

5 Conclusion and Future Directions

The next few years comprise a key moment in which social science must up its game to address and challenge inequality, in alliance with other actors who are already raising their voices. The time is now. (Wallerstein and Duran 2017, p. 1)

This chapter has discussed the collaborative methodology of participatory research (PR) including the participatory action research (PAR), community-based participatory research (CBPR), and the photovoice method. It is argued that participatory research provides opportunities for many marginalized individuals to be able to engage in research and find solutions that benefit not only themselves but also others in their own communities. The process of PR is empowering. It is a crucial methodology for researchers who attempt to bring social justice to the community involved in the research.

An emerging approach within the PR methodology is the photovoice method. Through the use of cameras, the participants are able to capture visual images that represent their lived realities. The visual stories can convey more vivid and concrete evidence to policy-makers and those in authorities and influence changes in policy and practice. The process is also empowering for those who take part. A number of photovoice projects have brought about positive changes in the lives and living situations of many individuals in different parts of the world. The authors strongly advocate this method in social inclusion research, particularly when we work with marginalized and vulnerable people.

It has been realized that, we are cognizant that many parts around the globe are currently caught in the struggles of what Rogers (2011, p. 3) depicts as "an age of fracture." This age of fracture is also applicable to research. Lawson (2015b, p. 2) warns that:

Research has the potential to marginalize and exclude vulnerable people, especially those who reside in challenging places. Moreover, research-based knowledge has the potential to silence the voices and choices of vulnerable people. When this occurs, the result is a bitter irony. Research designed to advance the common good ends up being exclusionary, discriminatory, and oppressive, perhaps becoming yet another form of domination.

A research approach that can help to avoid the form of domination that Lawson has cautioned is needed. As an inclusive research approach, PR can empower morally guided researchers to embrace their social responsibilities toward marginalized people in the world.

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