Editorial
'In the half shadows':
Research with hard to reach populations. Part III

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This issue presents a set of articles submitted in response to the call for papers involving research with hidden or hard to reach populations. The articles included in this issue report on studies in which the researchers encountered challenges in collecting data from the research participants.

In the opening article, Ruth Elliffe, Stephanie Holt and Caroline Overlien expose the obstacles which they encountered in their efforts to interview children about their experiences of living in families affected by domestic violence. The article titled, 'On the periphery: the marginalisation of children's participation in research on domestic violence and abuse', place a spotlight on the multiple layers of ethical, legal and practical obstructions which they encountered in their efforts to recruit child participants in their study. These included the issue of parental consent, which was difficult to navigate in contexts of parental conflict and violence because of the legal rights carried by parents even in such situations. The authors also encountered concerns from ethics committees and practical difficulties in gaining direct access to child participants which made their task of involving children in their study all the more complicated and difficult to achieve. They open the debate, echoed in some of the later articles in this issue, which concerns the paradox of conducting research with hard to reach populations. Essentially, the debate centres on the conundrum wherein hidden groups in society are not heard if researchers are prevented (be it by the law, ethical concerns or other factors) from interviewing or studying them directly and not, as is often the case, through a proxy such as other family members or service providers. This contribution by Elliffe, Holt and Overlien is especially valuable because it succeeds in amplifying the views of children who are members of families separated on foot of inter-parental violence. Although, the sample of children in their study is not large, the findings of the study are strongly informed by the children participants' views. Of equal importance is their well-articulated exposition of the implications of not including hard to reach voices in research studies, including the possibility that disturbing experiences of the most hidden groups in society is left unchallenged, unknown or misunderstood.

In their article titled, 'Just shut up and let them talk': Participation, Power and the

Parent Voice in the Child Protection System', Marie Gibbons and Nuala Connolly present their research with parents whose parenting was at the centre of Child Protection Conferences (CPC) called by child protection services on foot of serious concerns regarding the wellbeing or safety of one or more children in a family. Gibbons and Connolly's research sets out to discover how parents experience such meetings, along with the factors that help or impede their ability to participate in the CPCs and follow through on the recommendations agreed in the meeting. Their study demonstrates that attention by service providers, usually social workers, to preparing, supporting and following-up with parents can facilitate more meaningful engagement by the parents throughout the process.

The article, 'Pregnant women involved with statutory child protection services: the impact of difficult-to-reach on recruiting a non-biased sample' by Rosemaria Flaherty and Leah Bromfield critically reflects on the obstacles encountered in their study which sought to include the views of this group of service users. Their experiences of trying to recruit participants from a relatively small and hard to reach population offer insights which may assist all researchers engaged in research with hidden populations.

Joe Mooney's article, titled 'Using Biographical Narrative Interviewing Methodology to research Adults' Experiences of Disclosing Childhood Sexual Abuse', reports on the successful adoption of narrative research methods in a study with adults focusing on their experiences of retrospectively disclosing childhood abuse. This article highlights the importance of carefully constructing the research design and selecting an appropriate method which assists participants to speak about their experiences. His work succeeds in shedding light on the process of adult disclosure and it has the potential to shape, possibly transform, service delivery to this particular population.

In her research, Tamsin Cavaliero interviewed parents from the Irish Traveller community regarding their views on how their cultural traditions and history are taught within the Irish education system. Cavaliero's article, 'They're trying to teach them what I can teach them at home, and them not a Traveller!': Introducing Irish Traveller identity into the curriculum', succeeds in identifying an issue about which Irish Traveller parents are rarely consulted or heeded. Her article succeeds in highlighting how issues and views can be hidden in full view and the important role social research can play in exposing the lack of voice which some groups persistently experience in their social context.

In their article titled, 'Children with Down syndrome and their communication partners participating in research about communication', Clare Carroll, Sophie Linehan, Sinead Scott and Gráinne Quinn deliver an inspiring example of inclusive research in their report of their study with children whose voice is rarely heard, not just in the research context but in all contexts. Like many studies reported in this series on research with hard to reach or hidden populations, their study is an exemplar in research innovation, striving as they did to find ways to help their young research participants articulate their views. The involvement of Teddy, the teddy bear, as a research assistant, is inspiring and a fascinating example of creativity in data collection, a skillset which

is essential in the field of hidden population research.

Cliona O'Sullivan, Sinead McGann,Night Atwongyeire, Stuart Garrett, Tara Cusack, Deirdre Hurley-Osing and Ian Spillman's article, titled 'Attitudes and beliefs of parents of disabled children in Uganda', presents research on the experiences of parents of children with disabilities in Uganda. As in the many studies in this series, this study succeeds in revealing the views and perspectives of people who rarely get the opportunity to highlight the challenges and responsibilities they silently experience.

Finally, my own research is discussed in the article titled 'Speaking Truth to Power: Mental Health Service Users' Experiences of Participation in their Diagnosis and Treatment. This article is based on a study using the Voice Centred Relational Method, which is a narrative method that facilitates very detailed accounts from research participants. In this study, long-term mental health service users were asked to share their views on service user participation based on their own personal histories and long-term interactions with the mental health service system. This research method proved useful in revealing the paradoxes of participation which service users recounted, including their concerns about aspects of participation, such as sharing information about their symptoms with service providers. Most participants indicated that they carefully edited or filtered the information they shared with the care team in order to avoid what for them were unwanted consequences including changes (increases or decreases) to medication or deprivation of liberty under mental health legislation.

In all the articles in this issue, the authors adopt a critical stance regarding the obstacles they encountered in their attempts to reveal the experiences of hidden social groups, groups which are typically marginalised, forgotten or invisible to society. They display significant commitment in finding ways around the many obstacles that can arise in research of this nature, and which often involves delicate balancing between the need to place a spotlight on under-researched issues while at the same time ensuring that taking part in the research process is possible for participants and all the relevant stakeholders.

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