

Moulding Photovoice to Community: Supporting Aboriginal People Experiencing Homelessness to Share Their Stories through Photography

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Abstract : Working with people experiencing homelessness requires careful use of methods that support them to comfortably share their experiences. This is particularly important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the traditional owners of Australia, who have experienced intergenerational and compounding trauma since colonisation. Aboriginal cultures regularly experience research fatigue and distrust in research's potential for impact. They often view research as an extraction -a process of taking the knowledge that empowers the research team and its institution, rather than benefiting those being researched. Through a partnership between an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation and a university research institute, we conducted a community-driven research project with 70-90 Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness in Perth, Western Australia. The project aimed to listen to and advocate for the voices of those who are experiencing homelessness, guided by the Aboriginal community. In consultation with Aboriginal Elders, we selected methods that are considered culturally safe, including those who would prefer to express their experiences creatively. This led us to run a series of Photovoice workshops -an established method that supports people to share their experiences through photography. This method treats participants as experts and is regularly used with marginalised groups across the world. We detail our experience and lessons in using Photovoice with Aboriginal community members experiencing homelessness. This includes the ways the method needed to be moulded to community needs and driven by their individual choices, such as being dynamic in the length of time participants would spend with us, how we would introduce the method to them, and providing support workers for participants when taking photos. We also discuss lessons in establishing and retaining engagement and how the method was successful in supporting participants to comfortably share their stories. Finally, we outline the insights into homelessness that the method offered, including highlighting the difficulty experienced by participants in transitioning from homelessness to accommodation and the diversity of hopes people who have experienced homelessness have for the future.

Keywords : Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, photovoice, homelessness, community-led research

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