

# USING THE VISUAL TO ADDRESS GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IN RURAL SOUTH AFRICA ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Treffry-Goatley, Astrid;Wiebesiek, Lisa;Moletsane, Relebohile;  
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## Using the Visual to Address Gender-Based Violence in Rural South Africa: Ethical Considerations

Astrid Jane Treffry-Goatley, Lisa Wiebesiek,  
and Relebohile Moletsane,

Centre for Visual Methodologies for Social Change (CVMSC),  
School of Education, UKZN, South Africa

### ABSTRACT

Violence against women and girls (VAW) is a critical issue of global importance. Research suggests that indigenous girls and young women from resource-poor, rural communities are particularly susceptible to VAW and yet, few studies directly target this vulnerable population group due to ethical considerations. We present some emerging findings from rural KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, where we are using participatory visual research with girls and young women to investigate VAW in this context. Our results suggest while ethical issues may arise in the application of participatory visual tools in contexts of vulnerability, it is still possible to proceed without harm and to gain pertinent insight into this important issue.

**V**iolence against women and girls (VAW) is a form of human rights abuse that persists in every nation of the world and cuts across all socioeconomic groups (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], et al., 2013). There is a growing body of evidence of the magnitude and scale of VAW and its far-reaching public health, economic, and social consequences (UNICEF et al., 2013; World Health Organisation and London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine [LSHTM], 2010). Yet, although VAW is recognized as a critical issue of global importance, not enough is known about the extent to which it exists in specific population groups, particularly amongst indigenous communities (UNICEF et al., 2013). VAW is deeply

rooted in historical and structural inequalities and is inherently linked to harmful stereotypes about gender, race, and poverty that trigger and maintain such violence (UNICEF et al., 2013). Research suggests that indigenous girls and young women from resource-poor, rural communities are particularly susceptible to VAW generally and sexual violence, in particular due to the predominance of gendered cultural practices and belief systems in these settings, and a history of discrimination, displacement, extreme poverty, and rights violation (UNICEF et al., 2013; Crais, 2011; Amnesty International Canada, 2004; Moletsane, 2011).

While research exploring how VAW functions in rural communities, and the ways in which these communities can be made into safer places for girls and young women is vitally needed, it is particularly difficult to include this marginalized population in research. The very circumstances that need to be researched in order to be better understood and addressed, are the same circumstances that result in indigenous girls and young women being highly and disproportionately *vulnerable* to harm and coercion. These same circumstances qualify rural girls and young women as a vulnerable population group in terms of research ethics. As with other vulnerable population groups, Institutional Ethics Boards (IEB) require additional protection measures to be in place when working with indigenous girls and young women, as well as an elevated ratio of direct advantage over study risks (Macklin, 2003; World Medical Association, 2000; Zion, Gillam, & Loft, 2000; Nuffield Council on Bioethics, 2002). These additional protection measures are often seen as barriers to research on VAW in marginalized communities, particularly research that involves girls and young women.

While we acknowledge the undoubted importance of these additional protection measures and ethical requirements, they can also be exclusionary, since they can discourage studies from targeting the very population groups that are most in need of health and social interventions. There is a paucity of qualitative research studies that investigate violence against indigenous women and children internationally (UNICEF et al., 2013). Qualitative studies with indigenous communities, in particular those that incorporate participatory techniques, can potentially make a valuable contribution to building a body of evidence about VAW that is directly informed by the people whose lives are under study. Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) is an example of an emerging qualitative research framework, where indigenous knowledge and perspectives form the basis for a process of research and planning that is conducted *with* and *by* local people, rather than *on* them (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995; Chambers, 1994).

Visual participatory methods, such as photovoice, digital storytelling, participatory video, and participatory asset mapping are fast becoming popular in CBPR. Participatory visual methods are useful in resource-poor settings and can help to address some of the power imbalances that often emerge between researchers and participants in these contexts (Mitchell & Sommer, 2016). For example, visual media can help to articulate information that may otherwise have been difficult to share due to illiteracy, language obstacles, or topic sensitivity (Mitchell & Sommer, 2016; Gubrium, Fiddian-Green, Jernigan, & Krause, 2016). In photovoice, for example, participants take photographs to capture their views and experiences about a particular concern, and then collaboratively interpret the images to shed light on how they view the topic and to devise relevant action plans (De Lange et al., 2010). Participatory asset maps are visual artifacts that are drawn by community participants to represent their ideas, thoughts, tasks, or assets. These maps can be useful in qualitative research and allow for a rapid visual analysis of a specific intervention or topic (Burgess-Allen & Owen-Smith, 2010). Yet, despite the perceived value of incorporating participatory visual tools in research, due to the aforementioned barriers of working with marginalized population groups around sensitive topics, few studies have used these tools to investigate violence perpetrated against indigenous women and children. Consequently, not enough is known about the extent of VAW in this population group and it remains unclear how CBPR strategies using visual participatory methods can translate into meaningful and ethically responsible practice in contexts of vulnerability (UNICEF et al., 2013).

This paper offers a critical review of our ongoing research in rural KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa where we are using participatory visual methods to investigate VAW. South Africa has one of the highest rates of sexual assault in the world, and while absolute numbers are unreliable due to under-reporting, adolescent girls are known to be at great risk with approximately one in four young women becoming victims of sexual violence before their 18th birthday (African National Congress [ANC], 1998; Banwari, 2011).

Our work is part of a six-year, international and interdisciplinary partnership led by the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) in South Africa and McGill University in Canada. The title of the project is “Networks for change and wellbeing: Girl-led ‘from the ground up’ policy making in addressing sexual violence in Canada and South Africa” (hereafter referred to as Networks for Change). The Partnership seeks to study and advance the use of innovative approaches in knowledge-production, policy-making, and communication, in addressing sexual violence against indigenous girls and young

women. While framed in the global context of gender inequality and sexual violence, the Partnership focuses on two country contexts, Canada and South Africa.

The project is located within the interdisciplinary field of Girlhood Studies, which is typically “informed by girls themselves, and focuses on research *with* girls, *for* girls and *by* girls” (Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2008; Kirk, Mitchell, & Reid-Walsh, 2010; Schratz & Walker, 2005). Networks for Change comprises a number of projects in different research sites in South Africa and Canada led by one of the research organization partners. As is the case in South Africa, indigenous Canadian women remain highly vulnerable to many subtle and overt forms of violence, particularly in the context of relational and community violence (Berman & Jiwani 2002; Morrison, 2011). For example, in their review, Collin-Vézina, Dion, and Trocmé (2009) found an estimated 25 to 50% child sexual abuse prevalence rate in aboriginal adults surveyed in several communities across Canada in the past 20 years. Moreover, aboriginal women are eight times more likely than non-aboriginal women to be killed by an intimate partner (Statistics Canada, 2006).

The study discussed in this paper is led by UKZN, and the fieldwork that we report on occurred in rural KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Our primary goal in this study is to explore how visual CBPR can translate into meaningful and ethical practice in contexts of vulnerability using the South African site as a case study. To this end, we present: (1) a brief introduction to the context and methodology behind our work; (2) some emerging findings from an analysis of the data about the workings of VAW in this setting, and (3) the ethical issues that we have encountered in our work to date, the steps we took to address these issues, and the influence that these changes had on project outcomes.

## Method

### Setting

Our research project is based in the rural Khetani Township, which lies on the outskirts of the small town of Winterton in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Our decision to select Khetani as a research site was influenced by two factors: (i) Khetani is a resource-poor, rural location and, as mentioned above, young female residents in these settings are known to be highly vulnerable to sexual violence and (ii) one of our project partners, the Centre for Rural Health (CRH) at UKZN, which has been actively

involved in the local hospital of Emmaus for many years, recommended that we collaborate with a local non-government organization (NGO), the Isibani Community Centre (Isibani). Through their work, Isibani staff and volunteers come across and report high levels of VAW, including sexual violence in the community, and the CRH advised that it was likely to be supportive of the project. For the past 15 years, Isibani has offered a variety of services to residents of Winterton and Khetani, including food and clothing distribution, home-based care, assistance with welfare issues, adult literacy classes, emergency accommodation, HIV counselling and testing, as well as therapy and support to victims (for more information see <http://isibanicentre.org/tl/index.php>). When we presented the project to Isibani representatives in early 2016, they were immediately interested in collaborating. They have since demonstrated their support by:

- (1) Helping us to identify and recruit local stakeholders and youth participants;
- (2) Providing staff, including auxiliary health workers and a trained counsellor, to assist during research activities; and
- (3) Allowing us to use their facilities and venues for the purposes of the project.

The town of Winterton and Khetani Township rest at the foothills of the Drakensberg mountain range, which forms part of the boundary between South Africa and Lesotho. Khethani emerged in the late 1990s and is home to approximately 11,000 residents. It falls within the Okhahlamba Local Municipality, part of the larger Thukela District Municipality. According to the 2010 Census, the large majority of residents in the Okhahlamba Local Municipality are Zulu-speaking (Okhahlamba Local Municipality, 2015). Although this is a region of lucrative tourism, life is a struggle for most Khetani households, with many living below the poverty line and facing daily challenges of HIV, Tuberculosis, VAW, inadequate healthcare, illiteracy, poor service infrastructure, and high rates of unemployment (Okhahlamba Local Municipality, 2015).

## Details of Research

In this paper, we focus on seven photovoice visual artifacts and seven community maps produced by youth in Khethani. Through a thematic analysis of these 14 visual products, we aim to gain insight into the workings of VAW in this setting. Moreover, through a retrospective ethical analysis of the research process, we aim to shed light on how CBPR can translate into meaningful and ethical practice in contexts of marginality. We decided to use photovoice in this study because it has the potential to engage youth in analyzing the issues that affect their lives and in plans for taking action to address them. Importantly, photovoice also has the

potential to engage decision-makers in this youth-led analysis and action (Moletsane et al., 2009). Photovoice is also a fun process and in our engagement work in the past, we have found that “having fun” is a key ingredient for breaking boundaries and sustaining community engagement, particularly for youth participants (Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2002). Our decision to use participatory asset maps reflects our adoption of an asset-based approach in our research wherein researchers work collaboratively with community members to identify and mobilize existing strengths, resources, skills, and potential to address specific issues (Cunningham & Mathie, 2002; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993).

### **Participant Recruitment**

Recruitment for this study took place in collaboration with a teacher from a local secondary school in Khethani. This teacher runs a peer education group of high school scholars, which is responsible for designing and promoting school awareness campaigns to address teenage pregnancies, sexual VAW, and HIV transmission. We approached this teacher as part of our community engagement activities because rural communities are known to be poorly resourced in terms of health, education and social service infrastructure and schools are often the institutions best placed to promote community involvement and partnerships to bring about social transformation (de Lange et al., 2010). With this teacher’s permission, we visited the peer education group members at school during one of their lunch hour meetings and invited them to take part in the project. As all 13 peer educators showed great interest in the project, we went back to meet with them the following week with assent forms for them to sign, and information and consent forms (ICFs) (translated into isiZulu) for their parents or guardians to sign. Before distributing these documents, we read through them carefully with the group, who then had an opportunity to ask questions before signing the assent forms provided. Peer educators interested in participating in the project returned signed ICFs to the teacher the following week. Among those who returned a signed consent and assent form was a boy (whom we will discuss in a later section in this paper).

### **Workshop Details**

To date, in addition to other engagements in the community (gaining access, participant recruitment, consultations with community partners, and so on), we have held two key workshops at this research site. The first was a one-day community engagement workshop at the Isibani Health Centre in Winterton on May 25, 2016, to which local community leaders were invited. The second was a three-day visual

methods workshop for our participants during the winter school holidays (June 29 to July 1, 2016). The workshop was held at the Isibani Welfare Centre in Khethani. For the purposes of this paper, we will focus on this second event as an example of working ethically in participatory ways with girls and young women.

**Table 1**  
*Workshop Structure*

WORKSHOP PROGRAM:	
Day 1	Introduction, icebreaker, body-mapping exercise, check-out session
Day 2	Check-in session, leadership training, photo tutorial, photovoice activity, check-out session
Day 3	Check-in session, art tutorial, participatory mapping exercise, check-out session

**Day one.** On the first day, we had a late start. By mid-morning, only seven of the 13 participants that we were expecting had arrived. Apparently, there was an event at the local church at the same time and some participants had decided to attend that instead. On learning this and having waited for a few hours, we decided to proceed with a smaller group. After a short introduction and icebreaker, we started the first session of a body-mapping exercise. It is important to note that since this multi-session exercise is not yet complete, we have decided, in this paper, to focus on photovoice and participatory asset mapping. Day one closed with a check-out session, during which participants shared what they liked about the day, how they were feeling at the time, and other feedback.

**Day two.** We ran a half-day, interactive leadership-training workshop, focusing on different kind of leaders and leadership styles, and highlighting the qualities of a good leader. After an in-depth discussion about national, international, and local leaders, participants worked on a self-reflective exercise where they assessed their strengths as leaders and qualities that they would like to develop to become stronger leaders in their communities. After lunch, we distributed digital tablets to each person and we began the photovoice activity by running a short, practical tutorial introducing participants to basic photography techniques. We also discussed how a photograph is a representation of something, and demonstrated how visual techniques such as extreme close-ups, silhouettes, and posterior shots can be used to take anonymous portraits. In this session, we discussed some of the ethical issues that should be considered when taking photographs, including the importance of



obtaining informed consent when taking photographs of others (e.g., informing people what the photographs would be used for).

Before moving on to the main photovoice exercise, we engaged in a practice run to ensure that everyone was familiar with how the camera function on the tablets works and the photovoice process. Thereafter, participants were split into two groups (one of three and one of four) each with a tablet. Each person was asked to take two photographs within the confines of the Welfare Centre yard, one of a space where they felt safe, and one of a space where they did not feel safe. After 20 minutes, they returned and we used mobile photograph printers to print all 14 photographs. Each person then stuck their two pictures onto a blank piece of paper, and used colored felt-tip pens to write explanatory sentences for each of the pictures. These “mini posters” were stuck on the wall and each participant presented the ideas represented in their photographs to the group in an interactive discussion session about safety in the community. We closed the day with a check-out session, where participants had a chance to reflect on the day’s activities and make suggestions for future meetings.

**Day three.** On the final day of the workshop, we ran a participatory asset mapping session and asked participants to develop four drawings in response to the following four questions:

1. What are the challenges facing you being safe in your community?
2. What things would you change so that you can feel safe in your community?
3. What resources already exist in your community that can support this change?
4. How can we put this change into action?

We asked participants to produce the “maps” individually and to produce an artwork and accompanying text in response to each question. Participants were given a variety of art materials to use in their work, including water-based paints, pencil crayons, oil pastels, felt tip pens, colored paper, scissors, and glue. Each participant was asked to refer to the four questions listed above, which were inscribed on a piece of A3 board in the front of the room. The board was divided into four quadrants around the central topic of “Girls’ Safety,” with a question in each quadrant. The first two questions were tackled before lunch and the second two in the afternoon session. At the end of the day, each person stuck their poster on the wall and had roughly 10 minutes to present their ideas to the other participants. The day ended with a check-out session, where the group discussed the issues raised, spoke about the project more generally, and spoke about the action points that had been identified.

## Data Analysis

During a two-day workshop in early August 2016, the core project team conducted an analysis of the visual data that had been produced by the participants. Thematic narrative analysis techniques were applied to interrogate the text, photographs, and original artwork produced in the photovoice and participatory asset maps, respectively. In thematic analysis, researchers focus primarily on the literal meaning of the content at hand. This is a useful technique when theorizing across a number of texts (Riessman, 2004; 2008). We started by methodically familiarizing ourselves with the content of the photographs and asset maps and then manually devised themes based on repeated ideas that we had identified in the visual text. It is most important to note here, however, that while these themes offer some valuable insights into the contextual landscape of VAW in this setting and participant perceptions of VAW, these are preliminary data, and the themes arising from them are likely to evolve over the course of the project as new visual media are created, and participants become more actively involved in collaborative data analysis. Below, we outline and discuss the themes that emerged.

## Emerging Findings and Discussion

This section is divided into three main parts: (1) a sample description of the participants and visual media, (2) a retrospective ethical analysis of the challenges that arose in the research, and (3) an overview of our emerging findings from a preliminary analysis of the photovoice and participatory asset maps, respectively.

### Description of Participants

There are seven participants in the study: six girls and one boy. All seven participants are South African citizens or residents and their ages range from 15 to 18 years old. All seven participants attend the local high school and are members of the peer education group. All except one of the participants live within walking distance of the Isibani Welfare Centre in Khetani.

### Ethical Analysis

The following discussion of the emerging findings is framed in relation to the measures taken to ensure that the research under discussion is sensitive and responsive to the ethical issues that arose while using visual participatory methodologies with

the youth to investigate the sensitive topic of sexual violence. In the collaborative work that we have done with participants to date, we have encountered a number of ethical quandaries that we have resolved via a number of strategies.

The first ethical puzzle to arise in the research process was how we could work *safely* with local young women and girls to address this sensitive topic, given the reported high rates of VAW generally and sexual violence in particular, the shortage of supportive infrastructures, and the often oppressive patriarchal norms that characterize this rural community. From the outset, we were aware that if it became widely known in the community that participants were involved in a research project about sexual violence, it might be assumed that the participants were reporting personal cases of abuse and that this might lead to further or intensified victimization. Since our primary ethical responsibility as researchers is to ensure that our activities do not place participants at risk of harm (Lange, Meek, Rogers, & Dodds, 2013), we adopted additional protection measures to circumvent this.

Our first protection strategy was to focus on the broader issue of “Girls’ Safety,” rather than addressing sexual violence. Thus, all project documents, including invitation letters and information sheets distributed to community stakeholders, participants, and parents, as well as participant consent and assent forms, refer to “Girls’ Safety.” This strategy also informed the development and wording of the prompts for the photovoice activity and the questions for the asset-mapping activity. During these activities, we made no attempt to coerce participants into discussing sexual violence, but allowed this issue to surface organically. Given the prevalence of sexual violence in this context, we assumed that it would emerge in our work. Furthermore, by using an experienced facilitation team and ensuring that two trained counsellors (Isibani staff) were on site to provide emotional support both during and/or after the workshop, we were prepared for a situation in which participants might choose to speak about sexual violence on a community level or report a case of personal abuse.

Unintended disclosure of identity was another key ethical issue that we prepared for in a context of VAW and in particular, sexual violence. The IEBs involved in this multi-site project stipulated that the youth participants must remain anonymous. Drawing on our experience of conducting participatory visual research to explore VAW and HIV in other rural settings in South Africa, we employed protective tactics in our choice of visual participatory method and the way in which this method was used. For example, we used drawings for the community maps, rather than photographs (which would have required participants to go around the community taking pictures). In the photovoice activity, we encouraged participants to make use of the anonymous

photographic techniques described above. These visual techniques enable participants to share their ideas and collaborate in the project without disclosing their identities. In addition, we requested that participants use a pseudonym rather than their real name on the visual data that they produced.

While respecting the ethical requirements stipulated by the IRBs, the need for participant anonymity itself generates an ethical dilemma—how can we conduct truly collaborative research in which participants and their contributions are credited and truly valued as co-creators of knowledge without participants having the option of claiming their work as their own through having their names and identities acknowledged? This dilemma warrants further examination as the project proceeds. In the meantime, we have actively attempted to give value to participant contributions in this project without disclosing identities or running the risk of economic coercion.

Our use of the CBPR approach in this project speaks to how highly we value participant contribution and knowledge, and reflects our commitment to working *with* participants in our investigation of VAW in this community. Moreover, in our general interactions with participants, such as in the daily check-in and check-out sessions that we had during the three-day visual participatory methods workshop, we took care to elicit, encourage, and actively listen to their suggestions and opinions and, where possible, we endeavor to incorporate these into our work and future planning. For example, at the workshop the youth demonstrated and expressed a passionate interest in drama and music, and we have therefore decided to integrate these methods in our future work. This decision is also reflective of the asset-focused approach in our work, which obliges us to build on existing skills and interests, rather than forcing our own preferences onto participants. A second example of how we demonstrate value for participant involvement in the project involved inviting two participants (due to resource constraints, we could only take two who were selected by their teacher) to attend our international project meeting in Durban in July 2016. The meeting was an opportunity for these participants to share their knowledge, opinions, and experiences, learn more about the project, and network and socialize with other partners on the project.

In grappling with another ethical dilemma—that of economic coercion in a resource-poor setting—we ask: Is it possible to conduct collaborative research of mutual benefit and show value for participant time and effort without handing out a monetary stipend. To address this complex ethical issue, we took a number of deliberate steps to ensure that the ratio of direct advantage over study risks was elevated, without economic inducement pressuring otherwise unwilling participants to explore a sensitive and potentially disturbing topic.

Firstly, we chose to run the workshop at a venue that was within walking distance of most homes in Khethani. Participants who lived too far from the venue to walk were reimbursed for travel expenses incurred. Secondly, we ran the workshop during the school holidays, to avoid disrupting participants' school program. We also attempted to make up for loss of time spent with friends and family, by providing plenty of tasty and nourishing food, and ensuring that the activities were enjoyable and relevant to participants' everyday lives. The half-day leadership course was included in the program in recognition and support of the participants' interest in community change as peer educators. In addition, participants were able to learn using high-tech digital tablets—a rare opportunity in this resource-poor setting. On the last day of the workshop, we asked participants to come dressed in their favorite outfits so that they could take portraits of each other and each take a print of their portrait home. Participants also took part in the process of producing community maps. In under-resourced schools, art materials are often considered an unnecessary expense. Our participants thoroughly enjoyed spending time exploring the different materials and techniques and being creative. In fact, they responded so enthusiastically to this creative exercise that the session took significantly longer than we had expected and we were unable to complete a prioritization exercise that we had planned for the end of the day. We believe that these measures made the workshop a beneficial and rewarding experience for participants and that we successfully elevated the ratio of direct advantage over study risks.

Another ethical conundrum arose around our strategy for participant recruitment. We chose to recruit from the existing peer education program at the local high school, rather than the general school population, as their voluntary participation in this program indicates an interest in issues affecting their peers and community, and a willingness to be change agents in their school and wider community. However, this decision produced its own ethical issues. Firstly, other girls both in the school and girls who were not currently attending school, who may have been interested in participating, were not given the opportunity to put their names forward. Secondly, despite our emphasis on the fact that we were looking to recruit girls only, our first meeting with the peer educators was attended by a boy—the only male peer educator. His desire to be part of the group, supported enthusiastically by his fellow peer educators, forced us to confront our own conceptualization of gender in our work. It has become increasingly clear that this participant is gender non-conforming and identifies strongly with the girls in the group. While our decision to include this young man in our research project may be more ethical and inclusive, it has led to certain complications in our work, since we are not always certain how to frame our questions. If we ask about “youth” safety rather than “girls’” safety, we risk losing our focus on

VAW, the key issue in this project. Yet, if we continue to ask always about “girls’” safety, we risk excluding our male participant from these discussions, who because of his identity, might face similar violence in the context of traditional gender norms prevailing in this community. Further, now that we have included a gender non-conforming male participant not entirely in keeping with the focus of the project, the question becomes one of whether to redefine the focus of our project. Could the inclusion of the safety of boys, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth in the community contribute to our understanding of sexual violence against girls and young women and strategies for addressing it? Only further work with this group and clarifying our concept of gender in our work will shed light on this issue. In the meantime, we have been using the terms “girls” and “youth” somewhat interchangeably. As a result of this strategy, it appears from an examination of the preliminary data that a number of participants have addressed the issue of youth rather than girls’ safety, a focus which is broader than that of the project.

Another key ethical issue that has arisen in our work relates to informed consent for minor participants to participate in research focused on a potentially distressing or harmful topic. Since most of the participants are younger than 18 years old, we needed to ask for parental consent before we could work with them. However, mindful of the fact that VAW—including sexual violence—often occurs in the home (Dunkle et al., 2004; Lalor, 2004), we were concerned about how to ask parents or guardians for consent in a way that would not compromise the safety of potential participants. As mentioned above, one strategy that we employed was to avoid addressing the topic of sexual violence directly and instead taking girls’ safety as our starting point.

## Emerging Content Findings

The emerging findings arising from an analysis of the data generated to date point not only to the complexity of the context in which our participants live and the context in which we are conducting our research, but also to the importance of having a fairly detailed understanding of the research context.

**Photovoice.** A number of broad themes emerged from our analysis of the photographs, text, and participant discussions framed around the two prompts—*where I feel safe* and *where I do not feel safe*. These themes are consistent with those emerging from an analysis of the asset map data. The data suggests that the participants feel safest in contained spaces such as their home, church, school, or in a gated space. Unsafe spaces were generally less contained in nature and included dams and mountains. Children were seen to be unsafe in these spaces without adult supervision.

Walking near taverns (informal liquor outlets), on the streets, in the darkness, or in the middle of nowhere were also viewed by participants as unsafe activities in this context.

These emerging findings point to some of the wider contextual features, including rurality and marginality, that affect and influence the safety of girls and young women in this community, including their vulnerability to sexual violence.

**Asset maps.** Our thematic analysis of the participatory asset maps produced by our participants, including the drawings, text, and participant discussions, produced a number of broad emerging themes related to each of the four questions that were used as prompts. It is noteworthy that although we chose not to address the topic of sexual violence directly, it emerged in this exercise and the photovoice exercise. Further, by focusing on the safety of girls and young women in the community, we gained valuable insight into the nature of VAW generally, and sexual violence in particular, within the broader context of girls' safety in Khetani.

*The following themes emerged in relation to Question 1. What are the challenges facing you being safe in your community?* First, the participants identified **environmental factors**, specific natural features in their rural spaces that place them at risk of harm if they are unsupervised by a parent or elder. These included dams and mountains, where children may drown, fall, or be attacked by wild animals. In addition, "middle of nowhere places," such as open fields, were seen to be risky spaces to inhabit. Second, participants identified **poor sanitation infrastructure** and pollution (such as throwing garbage into local rivers) as issues contributing to illness and lack of safety for people. This point reflects the poor infrastructure in rural areas, since running water is in short supply and refuse removal is virtually nonexistent. Third, **taverns** (informal liquor outlets) were identified as a barrier to safety that enables substance abuse and transactional sex. Moreover, participants observed that when inebriated men leave these taverns, they sometimes attack girls, rape them, and "spill blood." This is a direct reference to sexual violence. In this instance, the sexual violence takes place in or around a very male dominated space in which the sense of entitlement to female bodies founded in patriarchal norms often goes unchallenged.

*The following themes emerged in relation to Question 2. What things would you change so that you can feel safe in your community?* Greater **parental involvement** was something that participants would like to see, including supervision of children outside the home to mitigate the risk of environmental hazards. In addition, **safety infrastructure**, such as fences around dams, was also presented as a solution to the problem of environmental hazards. Further, participants identified

**places of safety** as a way to protect children who have been abused, another direct reference to sexual violence. Finally, participants felt that **counselling** should also be provided to girls who have been sexually abused to help them overcome the trauma.

*The following themes emerged from participant responses to Question 3. What resources exist in your community already that can support this change?* First, **the police** could make the community safer by closing down taverns, removing drug dealers from the community, and arresting intoxicated men who attack girls (direct reference to sexual violence). Second, participants identified **elders** as an asset who could be more involved in supervising children and thus ensuring their safety.

*An analysis of responses to Question 4. How can we put this change into action?* generated the following themes: **Garbage** should be put in bins; **fences** should be constructed to protect children from environmental risks; young women should **avoid being in unsafe spaces** and playing outside; participants felt they could implement **communication and community** awareness interventions to solve the problems raised.

## Conclusion

The discussion of emerging findings offered above shows that participatory visual research with indigenous girls and young women can offer valuable insights, not only into the way in which VAW generally and sexual violence in particular, functions in specific communities, but also into the way in which the girls and young women themselves understand VAW and their own vulnerability. While the results that we present are framed within a rural South African context, we trust that the information that we share here can support researchers and protect other vulnerable groups that are engaged in visual participatory research studies. Our findings suggest that a context of marginality and rurality continues to leave indigenous girls and women at risk of violence and abuse, and that additional research is required to further investigate this issue and develop appropriate interventions. In our experience, we found that while ethical issues may arise, which can generate anxiety and resistance among researchers and the ethical bodies to which they are accountable, it is still possible to apply CBPR using visual methodologies in meaningful and safe ways in contexts of vulnerability. Therefore, our work suggests that researchers need to embrace working with these ethical issues and commit to actively involving indigenous girls and young women in ethically responsible and collaborative research projects. In this way, we can ensure that, as researchers, we do not perpetuate the exclusion of those



who are most marginalized by excluding them from the research processes and interventions that they so urgently need.

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**Astrid Treffry-Goatley** is a postdoctoral fellow with a background in ethnomusicology and ethnographic research. Her current research interests concern understanding the social and ethical aspects of conducting collaborative health research with young women in low-income settings and her specific areas of focus are gender, vulnerability, health systems, community engagement, and policy making. In recent years, she has focused on the advancement of participatory visual methods to support public engagement with global health research. She is the first author of 15 peer-reviewed publications, has presented orally at over 10 international conferences, and has been involved in the production of five films.



**Lisa Wiebesiek** is the Project Co-ordinator for the Networks for Change and Well-being: Girl-led 'from the ground up' policy-making to address sexual violence in Canada and South Africa project at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). She is a PhD candidate in the School of Education at UKZN. She has previously worked in the fields of HIV prevention and rural education development. Her areas of interest include adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender and sexuality education, girlhood studies, and visual participatory research methodologies.



**Relebohile Moletsane** is Professor and the John Langalibalele Dube Chair in Rural Education in the School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban, South Africa. Her areas of research include curriculum studies, rural education, indigenous knowledge, gender and education, sexual and reproductive health education, girlhood studies, and girls' education in Southern African contexts. She is the co-author (with Claudia Mitchell, Ann Smith, and Linda Chisholm) of the book: *Methodologies for Mapping a Southern African Girlhood in Age of Aids* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers); and co-editor with Barbana Pini (lead) and Martin Mills of the 2016 book: *Education and the Global Rural: Feminist Perspectives* (London: Routledge).