



A Community-Based Participatory Theatre Methodology for FGM/C Abandonment in the Somali Region of Ethiopia

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Abstract

Female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) remains highly prevalent in the Somali Region of Ethiopia, sustained by deep-seated social norms. Conventional health communication strategies have frequently been insufficient to stimulate sustainable, community-driven abandonment, indicating a need for culturally grounded participatory methodologies. This methodology article describes the design and theoretical foundations of a community-based participatory theatre (CBPT) intervention for facilitating dialogue on FGM/C abandonment. Its primary objective is to provide a replicable methodological framework for practitioners and researchers working in similar contexts. The methodology was developed collaboratively with local health workers and community members. It follows a cyclical process of community mobilisation, participatory script development from local narratives, interactive forum theatre performances, and facilitated post-performance discussions. The approach is grounded in the principles of Freirean pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed to stimulate critical consciousness and collective problem-solving. As a methodology article, it presents no primary empirical results. Illustrative field observations suggest the methodology provided a platform for open dialogue. A prominent theme was the community's critical re-evaluation of the perceived religious necessity of FGM/C, with participants questioning long-held assumptions. The CBPT methodology offers a structured, culturally resonant approach for engaging communities on sensitive health issues. It moves beyond didactic messaging to foster a participatory environment where communities can critically examine social norms and envision collective change. Future applications should allocate ample time for community trust-building and facilitator training. Integration with broader public health and legal frameworks is advised for sustained impact. Further research should prioritise longitudinal evaluation of the methodology's effectiveness in shifting norms and behaviours. female genital mutilation/cutting; community-based participatory research; participatory theatre; theatre of the oppressed; social norms; Ethiopia; health promotion methodology. This article provides a detailed methodological framework for implementing community-based participatory theatre as a tool for health promotion and social norm change, contributing to the practical literature on participatory approaches in public health.

Keywords: *Female genital mutilation/cutting, Community-based participatory research, Participatory theatre, Social norms, Horn of Africa, Ethiopia, Health promotion*

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