

Reflexivity Statement

The research team is composed of four early-career women of color of LMIC origin or with ties to LMICs in the Caribbean, Southeast Asia, or Africa, and one late-career American man. All authors hold or are pursuing higher education degrees, and currently work or study in the United States, which may have resulted in elite capture or an imbalanced power dynamic in the context of this project. To better understand our position in the current WASH and global health landscape, and to contextualize the way our positionality — identities, experiences, and privileges — influence the conducting of this study, a few details on the background of each member of the research team is provided below.

Author Profiles

The first author (J-ML) is a Jamaican woman of Afro-Caribbean and Hakka Chinese heritage. She is a first-year doctoral student in Civil and Environmental Engineering with two (2) months of WASH field research experience and three (3) years of remote WASH project experience in Lesotho.

The second author (SB) is a young African-American woman of Guinean heritage. She was born in the Bronx in a low-income community and was raised in Conakry, Guinea. She is a first-generation student studying Computer Science. Her upbringing in Guinea has given her a firsthand understanding of the importance of WASH and fueled her interest in using technology as a way to transform global health.

The third author (KG) is a first-generation American. She is a Black woman and was raised in a low-income community. She has one (1) month of field experience collaborating with local health professionals and World Vision staff in rural Ghana on an independent research project examining gaps in women's mental health and the ways WASH is implicated in these gaps. Outside of the WASH sector, she has one (1) year of research on social justice practices and policy in the Netherlands and the United States to devise solutions for both countries.

The fourth author (JL) is a Malaysian woman of southeastern Chinese heritage. She is informed by her upbringing in a fast-growing LMIC with a parent who grew up in informal settlements, her middle-class educational background with attendance at HIC institutions, and firsthand experiences navigating the complex and relational nature of privilege (such as pursuing a career in a HIC with an LMIC passport). Over the past three (3) years, she has participated in WASH research and programming both remotely and in person, some of which have been HIC-led and others LMIC-led.

The fifth author (LN) identifies as a young Black woman who is an Afro-Caribbean third-generation descendant. She is a graduate of higher education with a background in Public Health, as well as working in the WASH sector, with experience conducting research in Philadelphia, PA, and Mafeteng, Lesotho pertaining to water access, safety, menstrual hygiene, and nutrition.

The senior author (JBT) is a caucasian American man with a Ph.D. in Behavioral Science and is an experienced WASH researcher.

At the beginning of the research study, J'Anna, Salamata, Leila, and Kaelah were all undergraduate students at Drexel University. J'Anna and Leila have since graduated. Justine held (and still holds) the position of WASH Fellow at World Vision and James held (and still holds) the position of WASH Research Lead.

Reflexivity Questions

This project was not a direct partnership between a HIC and LMIC, but rather a study involving LMIC researchers as participants. With this in mind, a reflexivity statement was drafted using some questions found in "Consensus statement on measures to promote equitable authorship in the publication of research from international partnerships" by B. Morton et. al.[1]

How have the positions of the authors influenced the work?

Although a majority of the authors are of minority backgrounds and have intersectional identities, we are associated with HIC institutions. Through education and professional endeavors, we have assimilated into the culture of HIC institutions which has influenced how we navigate the world and therefore the study design and approach of the research. Assumptions that the LMIC researchers interviewed had first-hand experiences with discrimination or had witnessed discrimination were made based on the idea that we ourselves have experienced or witnessed discrimination in a HIC. Additionally, the comfortability between the LMIC interviewees and HIC interviewers may have impacted the type of discriminatory experiences and content of these experiences that they were willing to share. Our definitions and considerations of what is discriminatory or neo-colonialist may differ culturally and in practice from that of the LMIC researchers that we interviewed, influencing our understanding of the data

How does the leadership of this paper reflect the concepts discussed?

Despite the presence of an experienced White man WASH researcher (JBT), all of the women authors (J-ML, SB, KG, JL, LN) led the stages of the research process and consulted the experienced researcher for guidance. The women researchers were recognized first for their roles in the research regardless of their career level or seniority within the WASH sector.

How were local researchers involved in the study design?

Based on their desired level of involvement, local researchers were involved in consultation at the conception phase of this study, as well as providing feedback on the interview guide. While two authors including the first author are citizens of LMICs or LMIC-originating, there is an overrepresentation of HIC-based researchers due to funding limitations and a fear of repercussions among some of the LMIC-based researchers and practitioners that were contacted.

How are the research staff who conducted data collection acknowledged?

All staff who conducted data collection were included as authors.

How have early career researchers across the partnership been included within the authorship team?

Early career researchers (J-ML, SB, KG, JL, LN) from both LMICs and HICs, were included in the authorship team. J-ML led the authorship of the paper, SB and LN developed the IRB proposal, KG and JL led the transcription and coding of the interviews, KG and J-ML led the initial literature review, and all authors participated in the interviews and presentation of the research.

How has gender balance been addressed within the authorship?

The authors include five women (J-ML, SB, KG, JL, LN) and one man (JBT). This can be attributed to the fact that this research was a partnership between World Vision and the Drexel University Dornsife Global Development Scholars Program [DGDS]. The DGDS program typically has more women applicants which have resulted in a gender imbalance favoring women researchers in this study as four authors were from this program.

What safeguarding procedures were used to protect local study participants?

To protect the identities of participants, the data were cleaned to remove all identifiers such as names and institutions. In disseminating the characteristics of participants, regions were used instead of countries to provide additional protection and that data was provided as an aggregated percentage. Participants are identified individually only by career status and gender.

Contradictions

Like much research that is produced considering questions of equity, discrimination, and justice, there are contradictions within this paper. For example, while we speak to epistemic violence in our analysis, we are also reinforcing the current episteme by producing this research as peer-reviewed 'proof' of discrimination within the WASH sector—although without this paper we know that LMIC researchers experience discrimination based on dialogue, lived experiences, and other ways of knowing. This project was carried out with the intention to raise awareness and evoke a sense of urgency to act in members of the WASH community as we have an understanding that under the current WASH paradigm, researched knowledge is taken more seriously.

Reference

[1] Morton B, Vercueil A, Masekela R, Heinz E, Reimer L, Saleh S, Kalinga C, Seekles M, Biccard B, Chakaya J, Abimbola S, Obasi A, Oriyo N. Consensus statement on measures to promote equitable authorship in the publication of research from international partnerships. *Anaesthesia*. 2022 Mar;77(3):264-276. doi: 10.1111/anae.15597. Epub 2021 Oct 14. PMID: 34647323; PMCID: PMC9293237.