



Reflecting on Innovative Methods and Methodological Innovation across the Gender, Justice, and Security Hub

(2020 – 2023)

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Evolution of methods and methodology

The Gender, Justice, and Security Hub's development in research methods and methodologies has been marked by a commitment to diversity, adaptability, and ethical reflection. Reviewing the results of [our initial survey in 2020](#), and [the subsequent assessment in 2023](#), we have identified several key lessons and adaptations, encompassing both methodological advancements and the challenges encountered. In this brief report, we focus on how the Hub and its projects' methods and methodologies have changed over time, as well as the role that the Hub has come to play in shifting members' thinking on methods and methodology.

Continuing methodological diversity

The Hub and its members have consistently shown a commitment to methodological diversity. As both reports show, researchers have used an array of different methods based on traditional, interdisciplinary, and innovative approaches. While traditional methods like surveys, interviews, and case studies have continued to prevail, there has been visible growth since 2020 in innovative methods such as arts-based approaches, creative workshops, and unique data collection methods like photovoice. Interdisciplinary methods have also continued to be used, including participatory action research (PAR) and ethnographic techniques. Importantly, while in 2020 some projects used mixed methods, this number had increased significantly in 2023.

Adaptability in challenging contexts

While in 2020 the main external challenge to Hub members was the COVID-19 pandemic, by 2023 – as the second report shows – funding cuts, and deteriorating security contexts in partner countries – particularly in Afghanistan and Sri Lanka – posed further significant challenges. Not surprisingly, one of the most noteworthy trends shown between the two reports, is the Hub and its members' methodological adaptability and innovation in navigating these challenges. By 2023, researchers had become adept at pivoting, adapting, and in some cases completely redesigning their research projects and methodologies. They moved from in-person fieldwork to creative online methods, adjusted data collection strategies, and managed their limited resources by collaborating with communities to maintain their research projects afloat. Nevertheless, by 2023 these constraints meant further downsizing research projects in terms of staff hours and tools used, which in turn generally further reduced access to informants (with some exceptions), and limited members' ability to engage with CSOs and policymakers. Significantly, the effects and consequences of the crises in Afghanistan and Sri Lanka on members' and partners' mental and physical health and security, as well as their projects, cannot be understated. Ultimately, however, the Hub and its members demonstrated a heightened capacity to respond to external challenges in innovative ways.

Ethical reflection and methodological shifts

The above-mentioned challenges and crises provided many opportunities for reflection on the ethical considerations of doing research with people. Both reports highlight the concern of researchers for participant safety, privacy, and confidentiality, especially given the shift to online data collection during the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2023 report, however, demonstrates continued and increased engagement with the ethical dimensions of research, especially in terms of feminist ethics, care ethics, and decolonising research methodologies. Especially triggered by the challenges the Hub and the world have faced since 2020, this reflexivity resulted in researchers developing more considerate, relationship-centred practices. Researcher engagement with these considerations resulted in a significant methodological shift within the Hub, encouraging members to question and innovate around ethical frameworks, and have contributed to a more holistic and care-centred approach to research methodologies in 2023.

Interdisciplinary learning and collaboration

The Hub's collaborative nature has encouraged interdisciplinary learning among researchers and expanded methodological boundaries. Many researchers reported not only having learned from within their disciplines but to have also engaged with practitioners, activists, and diverse communities. This interdisciplinary exchange has broadened researchers' perspectives, pushing us to adopt unconventional methodologies and to think beyond our disciplinary confines. These confines, however, were not completely transcended as members hoped in 2020. As shown in the second report, fundamental conversations across disciplines on epistemology and methodology were not as extensive as anticipated, which in turn limited the depth of interdisciplinary engagement and learning.

Shifts in thinking

Methodological development through Hub engagement

Participating within the Hub has had an important influence on members' thinking on methods and methodologies. Researchers expressed an increased awareness of the value and complexities of practicing ethical research methodologies, especially in crisis-affected contexts. The 2023 report shows that researchers have, since 2020, engaged in deeper reflections on the power dynamics between researchers and researched communities, both globally and specifically within conflict-affected contexts. Ultimately, this has fostered a more nuanced and careful approach to methodology.

Inspiration, learning, and expanding boundaries

While, in 2020, members hoped to find ways to improve the quality of their research data and change research processes, by 2023, members reported that being part of the Hub had inspired them to challenge and extend beyond traditional methodological frameworks. Collaborative involvement with diverse disciplines, practitioners, and communities have broadened researchers' horizons and encouraged them to rethink traditional research paradigms. This has led not just to a rethinking of the research process and relationships

with participants – as members hoped in 2020 – but to changes in practice centred on producing context-specific considerate research, increased equality within research teams, building researcher-participant relationships based on care. This expansion signifies an important departure from siloed disciplinary approaches, encouraging a more holistic and adaptive stance towards research methodologies.

Conclusion

The Hub's trajectory between 2020 and 2023 demonstrates marked changes in research methods and methodologies. Members' consistent commitment to methodological diversity, adaptability in challenging contexts, heightened ethical reflections, interdisciplinary learning, and boundary expansion illustrate the transformative impact of Hub participation on researchers' methodological thinking and practice. These developments underscore the Hub's pivotal role in cultivating a dynamic and reflective research culture that values adaptability, ethical considerations, and interdisciplinary collaboration in methodological approaches.



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