

Participatory health research with migrants: opportunities, challenges, and way forwards

Maria Roura

M Roura^{1,5}, *S Dias*^{2,5}, *J LeMaster*^{3,5}, *A MacFarlane*^{4,5}

¹School of Public Health, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland

²Public Health Research Center, NOVA National School of Public Health, Universidade NOVA, Lisbon, Portugal

³Kansas University Medical School, The University of Kansas Medical Center, Kansas City, USA

⁴GEMS, University of Limerick, Limerick, Ireland

⁵International Collaboration for Participatory Health Research, Berlin, Germany

Contact: maria.roura@ucc.ie

Background:

Migration has become one of the most politically pressing issues of the 21st century. Still, migrant health remains an under-researched area in global health. Participatory Health Research (PHR) can potentially contribute to a paradigm shift, from a pathogenic deficit model that sees migrants as passively affected by policies to their re-conceptualization as creative, inspiring, and actively engaged citizens in search of solutions. However, PHR is not a panacea and there are specific challenges in enacting meaningful and impactful projects in this field.

Methods:

This literature review examines the opportunities and challenges posed by the use of this approach in migrant health research. We highlight critical issues for consideration and provide some examples of successful PHR with migrants.

Results:

A number of successful initiatives illustrate the value of engaging migrants in the definition of the research agenda, the design and implementation of health interventions, the identification of health protective factors, and the operationalization and validation of indicators to monitor progress in this field. Still, within fragmented community landscapes that are not necessarily constructed along ethnicity traits, and real-world contexts that are far from the ideals of justice and equality, inadequate structures of representation and power dynamics can hamper a meaningful implementation of PHR with migrants.

Conclusions:

For each particular research context it is essential to reflect on what is the “optimal” level and type of participation that is more likely to leverage migrants’ empowerment so we can better advocate for our voices to be heard, and our rights to be addressed.

Key messages:

- Participatory Health research can potentially contribute to address migrant health challenges.
- The level and type of participation must be tailored to each research context.