



Online qualitative research with vulnerable populations in the Philippines: Ethical and methodological challenges during COVID-19

Vincen Gregory Yu^{a,*}, Jhaki Mendoza^b, Gideon Lasco^{a,c}

^a Development Studies Program, Ateneo de Manila University, Quezon City, Philippines

^b Social Medicine Unit, College of Medicine, University of the Philippines Manila, City of Manila, Philippines

^c Department of Anthropology, University of the Philippines Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Vulnerable populations
Drug war
Online research
COVID-19
Qualitative research
Philippines

ABSTRACT

Our article draws on two multi-sited studies to present the ethical and methodological challenges of conducting online qualitative research among vulnerable populations in the Philippines—specifically, among people who use drugs—during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the global scholarship has long articulated the difficulties inherent to pursuing research on such populations, we show how the specific milieu of the Philippines in the last three years has created exceptional, structural challenges to the conduct of said research. Besides the inevitable migration to online fieldwork brought about by the pandemic, researchers have had to contend with the continuing sociopolitical and existential threat to vulnerable populations posed by the government's drug war. Such a milieu, we argue, has further restricted access to potential study participants; redefined notions of intimacy and safety in conducting virtual data collection; and rendered people in vulnerable circumstances “more vulnerable” amid a climate of pandemic-induced precarity and aggravated distrust in the state—all of which have compelled researchers to undertake necessary innovations to uphold quality and equity in online research. We conclude by highlighting the need to maintain networks of trust with vulnerable communities, compensate research participants justly, and safeguard the independence of research institutions and people's trust in them.

1. Introduction

Much has been written in the last three years about the impositions of the COVID-19 pandemic on the conduct of qualitative research (Abad Espinoza, 2022; Bhatia et al., 2022; Cornejo et al., 2023; Howlett, 2022; Konken & Howlett, 2022; Newman et al., 2021; Roberts et al., 2021; Salma & Giri, 2021; Teti et al., 2020). But about conducting such research among specific vulnerable populations in specific sociopolitical milieus, the literature remains relatively limited.

In this article, we draw on our experiences as qualitative researchers in the Philippines to present the unique challenges of conducting online research among vulnerable populations in the country during the pandemic. We use Taylor Paige Winfield's (2022, p. 137) aggregate definition of vulnerability, built on preexisting scholarly conceptualizations, to pertain to “diminished autonomy, a lack of power, limited agency or capacity to function due to physiological, psychological, spiritual, and/or structural factors.” Our focus here is on people who use drugs—those who, for the last seven years, have been targeted by a state-sponsored ‘war on drugs’ that has killed tens of thousands of

mostly poor Filipinos (Lasco, 2021a). Secondly, we also include people living with or who are at risk of contracting HIV (including those who inject drugs)—a sector that warrants immediate scholarly attention, given that the country is one of the few in the world where HIV cases have been alarmingly on the rise (Philippine Department of Health-Epidemiology Bureau, 2020).

We begin with a brief background on conducting research among vulnerable populations, and on conducting qualitative research in the time of COVID-19. Then, we present data drawn from two multi-sited studies that took place between 2021 and 2022. We pay particular attention to participant recruitment and data collection since these have been the components of research most impacted by the pandemic-imposed migration to the virtual field. We structure our findings into three sections: In the first, ‘redefining trust-building’, we focus on the alterations to locating and recruiting study participants; in the second, ‘redefining intimacy’, we zero in on the conduct of the virtual interview; and in the third, ‘redefining vulnerability’, we discuss some ethical considerations that arose during the course of our studies. We conclude by highlighting three lessons from our experiences that can hopefully be

* Corresponding author. Development Studies Program, School of Social Sciences, Ateneo de Manila University, Katipunan Ave., Quezon City, 1108, Philippines.
E-mail addresses: vyu@ateneo.edu (V.G. Yu), jmendoza11@up.edu.ph (J. Mendoza), pdlasco@up.edu.ph (G. Lasco).

of use to other scholars who engage with people in vulnerable circumstances, whether in the Philippines or beyond.

2. Background: qualitative research, vulnerable populations, and COVID-19

The need to conduct research among vulnerable populations can be viewed as foremost a public health imperative: Stigmatized and marginalized, these populations often face disproportionate health risks compared to others, in part because marginalization itself drives these people away from and restricts their access to the relevant resources and services (Baah et al., 2019; Tuliao, 2021; Wilson & Neville, 2009; Winfield, 2022). Ironically, while public health programs and similar interventions may be intended to serve the needs of specific vulnerable populations, “the very individuals who might benefit most” from such programs are also frequently “the least studied, the least understood, and the most elusive” to the scientists and scholars charged “with understanding and improving [their] public health” (Lambert & Wiebel, 1990, p. 1). Moreover, without downplaying the documented harms that certain vulnerable populations have experienced, the health-risk paradigm that dominates the global scholarship—a framework that approaches people in vulnerable circumstances as always ‘problematic’ and entangled with certain health risks—has no doubt skewed our understanding of these populations’ contextual behaviors, lived realities, and, not least, supposed vulnerabilities (Drysdale et al., 2020; Møller & Hakim, 2021; Schroeder et al., 2022).

Regardless of whether or not the problematization of a particular vulnerable population is substantiated, however, research among these communities has always posed its unique set of challenges. Access—the questions of where to find study participants and, once found, how to get them to participate—remains a persistent issue (Dow & Boylan, 2020; Miller & Sønderlund, 2010; Witham et al., 2015). At the same time, embarking on such research is not without its risks; researchers can find themselves confronting unforeseen psychosocial stresses, working in hostile political environments and conflict-ridden areas, engaging communities that are targeted and criminalized by the state, or met by unwelcoming potential participants (Koehler et al., 2020; Thummapol et al., 2019). Conducting fieldwork among people who use crack cocaine in 1980s New York City, Eloise Dunlap et al. (1990) likened the study of people in vulnerable circumstances to an art form, in which researchers must deliberately strategize their methods, employ a combination of tailored approaches, and become more adaptable to the unpredictable milieus of their interlocutors. Indeed, to quote Camille Quinn (2015, p. 7), there is “no ‘simple’ way” of studying vulnerable populations; the literature across the decades evinces the multiplicity of methods and accommodations researchers have adopted to do so successfully (Webber-Ritchey et al., 2021). For instance, in place of in-person or physical data collection, some scholars have modified access to their interlocutors by resorting to social media and other online channels (King et al., 2014; Miller & Sønderlund, 2010), especially since, as Sarah Williams et al. (2012, p. 379) noted, the anonymity and asynchronicity afforded by collecting data virtually can “facilitate greater self-disclosure, increased reflexivity, and an opportunity to collect details of participant experiences over time.” Others have stressed the need for ‘culturally safe’ research that is cognizant of the sociocultural norms and contexts of the community being studied, in such terms as language, dress, and actual participant observation (Narag & Maxwell, 2014; see also Curtis et al., 2019; Lata, 2020). Parallel to this has been a clarion call to approach participants as study partners—rather than as subjects—and dismantle prevailing power structures and epistemologies by readily ‘sharing power’ with the individuals being studied (Wilson & Neville, 2009; see also Keikelame & Swartz, 2019; Thummapol et al., 2019). Furthermore, the need for researchers to take care of themselves has also figured in the discourse: Especially in settings rife with various forms of trauma, establishing clear boundaries, be they physical or symbolic, is essential to both researcher and participant safety in the

field and beyond (Owton & Allen-Collinson, 2014; Winfield, 2022).

What happens to qualitative research, then, amid a global disruption as sweeping as COVID-19? To some extent, it becomes even more relevant and urgent, especially to the study of vulnerable populations; transcending the epidemiologic to unpack the social, and prizing lived experience over the statistical, qualitative research is particularly well-suited to such uncertain times as the pandemic (Newman et al., 2021; Teti et al., 2020). This urgency also stems from recognizing that society tends to deal with pandemics and other large-scale emergencies in ways that neglect or, at the very least, deem of secondary importance the vastly different needs of people in vulnerable circumstances (Newman et al., 2021; O’Sullivan & Phillips, 2019). Notable adjustments have been made, then, beginning with the transfer of the field site from the physical to the virtual, consequently blurring such notions as ‘home’ and ‘private space’ (Abad Espinoza, 2022; Konken & Howlett, 2022), and the reliance of researchers on what Marnie Howlett (2022) described as ‘remote embeddedness’—in essence, field work from afar. More significantly, the definition of harm has also been expanded: Whereas once it pertained primarily to the structural and psychological, now it entailed foremost the scientific tangibility of viral transmission (Konken & Howlett, 2022; Roberts et al., 2021), compelling researchers to confront “the biophysical uneasiness of seclusion and pathogenic infection” (Abad Espinoza, 2022, para. 33).

Scouring the literature of the last three years, one quickly grasps an emergent paradox: Inasmuch as the pandemic has made conducting qualitative research both methodologically and ethically easier in some aspects, in others it has also made it more difficult and complicated (Konken & Howlett, 2022). For example, some scholars have found virtual data collection to be psychologically kinder to participants, in that online interviews supposedly enable these participants to open up more while also blunting the heavier emotional impact that figures in physical interviews (Azad et al., 2021). On the side of researchers, the resort to digital methodologies and materials has apparently expanded the possibilities of research itself (Konken & Howlett, 2022); in the words of Luis Gregorio Abad Espinoza (2022, para. 13), what was once just a “necessary evil or mere means of support” has made it possible to even study the previously understudied. Yet, these advantages have also produced their own pitfalls. The (over)reliance on digital technology across the many aspects of research, from data acquisition to transfer and storage, renders data more susceptible to privacy breaches or surveillance—a cause for concern especially in settings involving authoritarian governments (Konken & Howlett, 2022). And, notwithstanding videoconferencing methods, the distances imparted by these remote methodologies still result in the qualitative researcher’s “highly reduced sensory capacities” (Abad Espinoza, 2022, para. 30), making it more difficult to collect data that would otherwise be easy to gather in person: the participants’ visual cues and tics, expressions macro and micro, and, indeed, their entire material realities (Webber-Ritchey et al., 2021).

Inarguably, the pandemic’s impositions on research—and the paradoxes of virtual research during the pandemic—have come to bear more heavily on vulnerable populations and those who study them. While virtual qualitative research has made research itself more democratic and equitable, it has also exaggerated existing inequities or allowed new ones to flourish (Konken & Howlett, 2022; Roberts et al., 2021; Salma & Giri, 2021). This is most demonstrable in the methods that have come to define this so-called new normal: Virtual channels of data collection and participant engagement have made it easier to access vulnerable communities, but ironically these same methods have also come to embody the exclusionary paradigm representative of society at large, where those who are poor, materially deprived, or geographically isolated find themselves even more disadvantaged (Konken & Howlett, 2022; Maulod et al., 2022; Newman et al., 2021; Roberts et al., 2021). To this end, scholars around the world have, for the last three years, reflected rigorously on the ways the academic community approaches and engages with vulnerable communities, noting the necessity for

'differentiated approaches' (Maulod et al., 2022) that are population- and community-specific. These include, for starters, the way research begins: Equity, in this case, now also means recognizing the importance of refracting the pandemic experience from the perspectives of people in vulnerable circumstances, accounting not only for the technical aspects of research (e.g., study design, choice of interview questions), but also for the subjects and topics deemed worthy of discussion (Cornejo et al., 2023; Maulod et al., 2022; Roberts et al., 2021; Salma & Giri, 2021). In engaging vulnerable populations during the pandemic, scholars have also identified numerous practical measures to ensure ethical conduct and methodological rigor, including drafting contextualized data-collection protocols as a form of risk mitigation (Cornejo et al., 2023; Roberts et al., 2021); modifying the obtainment of consent by eschewing the traditional written means in favor of methods deemed friendlier to the vulnerable, such as online, verbal, or video (Newman et al., 2021; Roberts et al., 2021); putting a premium on digital security by reducing videographic and photographic trails in cyberspace (Newman et al., 2021); and becoming more attuned to nonverbal cues, emotions, and, in the case of audio-reliant methods, the unseen elements of data collection such as stutters and pauses (Azad et al., 2021; Weber-Ritchey et al., 2021). Needless to say, the importance of cultivating (existing) partnerships with communities of vulnerable people, including with gatekeepers, has never been more crucial, at a time when already-limited access to these communities has been compounded further by the pandemic's isolating milieu (Bhatia et al., 2022; Hoeflich et al., 2022; Lata, 2020).

However, despite the relative wealth of global literature on conducting online research among vulnerable populations, we know little of the ways that researchers in the Philippines have managed to do so during COVID-19. To date, only three published scholarly articles have addressed this very issue head-on. Studying vaccine hesitancy in the country, Mark Donald Reñosa et al. (2021) described the 'fear' that spoke of a generational gap within their study team; of people's apprehensions toward transitioning from the planned in-person setup to a virtual mode of data gathering; and suggested ways to attenuate technological disruptions throughout. In a separate article on the same study, Mila Aligato et al. (2021) delved into the challenges of helming focus groups online, highlighting the amplified role of notetakers during discussions, the challenges of recruiting participants remotely and sustaining discussions amid a physical divide, and the importance of preserving participants' privacy when using platforms as public and ubiquitous as Facebook. Meanwhile, in their multi-sited study, Maria Virginia Aguilar et al. (2021, pp. 57–65) emphasized the value of maintaining relationships with the community being studied, especially when circumstances (as with the pandemic's) curtail the researchers' physical interactions with the participants. Of conducting research among vulnerable populations that have figured in topical sociopolitical discourse in the Philippines—in particular, people who use drugs—nothing has so far been written. Seven years since former President Rodrigo Duterte officially launched his drug war, and with the present administration showing no concrete signs of veering away from Duterte's approach toward people who use drugs (Luna, 2022), the exigency to ameliorate the aforementioned gap in the academic literature cannot be overstated.

3. Approach

3.1. Research contexts

In what follows, we narrate our experiences from two multi-sited studies conducted in the Philippines during the pandemic, and identify the unique learning points we gleaned from and resonant challenges we encountered during the course of these studies. Previously, the three of us authors—all Filipino medical anthropologists—had worked in various projects related to the social, cultural, and political aspects of health care, including illicit drug use. The third author himself has

worked extensively on drug-related research for the last decade and even edited the first comprehensive volume to tackle drug use in contemporary Philippines (Lasco, 2021a). Embarking on these two studies could therefore be viewed as par for the course as far as our careers were concerned.

Our first study was about chemsex, a form of sexualized drug use where the intent is to prolong or enhance a sexual encounter (Bourne et al., 2014). Specifically, we aimed to fill a knowledge gap in the local academic literature by exploring where, when, how, and why chemsex transpired in the country. This study involved the first and third authors, and took place from May–August 2021. Within this period, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 34 individuals who had engaged in chemsex in the country since Duterte came to power in June 2016. We received no funding for this study; whatever costs we incurred (e.g., interview transcription costs, participant tokens) were shouldered by the third author.

Meanwhile, the second study looked into the intersection of drug use and HIV infection, exploring the risk behaviors and access to HIV services of Filipinos who use drugs in general (i.e., those who inject drugs and those who do not). It was funded by two non-profits in the country and carried out in collaboration with the Philippine Department of Health's (DOH) efforts to address the local HIV epidemic. This study's primary objective was to document the experiences of people regarding drug use, as well as the relevant health and social services, and apply the findings to develop an HIV surveillance tool, identify strategies to improve government engagement with people in vulnerable circumstances, and expand public health interventions for people who use and inject drugs. The study took place from January–April 2022 and involved semi-structured interviews with 50 individuals, 38 of whom were interviewed virtually. The third author served as primary investigator, with the first and second authors as research associates. Apart from funding the study, the two non-profits provided logistical support during participant recruitment, offered culturally sensitive insights regarding the research methods and approach, and occasionally served as mediators between us and potential participants. While not financially involved with the study, the DOH also offered additional logistical support during recruitment by linking us up with some organizations that could provide leads on potential participants.

In both studies, we formulated the interview questions ourselves, although as mentioned in the previous paragraph, the non-profits that funded our second study provided some input into making the methodology more culturally sensitive. We used local languages to interview participants according to their preference; these included English and Tagalog, which all three of us speak, as well as Cebuano, which the first author also understands. For both studies, we conducted virtual interviews using a variety of social media and teleconferencing platforms, including Messenger, Viber, Telegram, and Zoom, in addition to a few that utilized mobile phone calls. At the end of the second study, we submitted an internal report that was shared between our funders and the DOH; the first study, on the other hand, has since produced three full-length journal articles (Lasco & Yu, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c).

In delving into this discussion, it is likewise prudent to look at local research practices that preceded the pandemic. Way before Duterte's presidency, the few scholars conducting research among people who use drugs in the country (Lasco, 2014, 2018a) already worked in ways that affirmed the words of W. Wayne Wiebel (1990, p. 5), who said that "qualitative research is often the only appropriate means available for gathering sensitive and valid data from otherwise elusive populations of [people who use drugs]." Evidently, this all stemmed from an awareness of how drugs and the people who use them have figured and long been perceived in Philippine society: as synonymous with "dangerous" addicts, central to moral panics (Cohen, 1972) that have ensued in crucial historical junctures, and, like in many parts of the world, deserving foci of state-sponsored, anti-drug crusades (Tan, 1995; see also (Lasco, 2021a) for a comprehensive discussion on drugs vis-à-vis Philippine society). Inevitably, as Lee Edson P. Yarcia (2021, p. 298) noted, "the

history of drug laws in the Philippines [has become] an account of punitive policies against people who use drugs”—one that culminates presently in the [Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002 \(2002\)](#), which metes out severe punishments to anyone caught selling, using, or possessing prohibited drugs (e.g., life imprisonment for the possession of 10g of cocaine, 50g of crystal methamphetamine, or 500g of marijuana).

Given that history, the need to maintain participant privacy and security has therefore been of utmost importance to drug-related research. Predating the Duterte era, this fact was already not lost upon research participants themselves; as verbalized clearly by an informant in the first author's ([Lasco, 2014](#)) p. 787) ethnography of methamphetamine use among poor, Filipino youth, those who used drugs but failed to prioritize their security had “only two fates: the graveyard or the prison cell.” Undoubtedly, Duterte's presidency ushered in a harsher ‘climate of fear’ ([Warburg & Jensen, 2020](#)), driving the targets of its drug war further into the margins of society and making research among their communities all the more challenging. While research was perceived as “[posing] no additional risk to the community,” researchers still had to make significant adjustments to their methodologies, such as “[avoiding] focus groups, which might attract undue attention, and [working] in a community where they had the cooperation of local officials” ([Lasco, 2021b](#), p. 142). At the same time, by immersing in these targeted communities, researchers also exposed themselves to what Anna Bræmer Warburg and Steffen Jensen (2020, pp. 8–9) described as the “heightened unpredictability” of an “ever-shifting terrain”, where extrajudicial killings took place even in public and in broad daylight, and researchers could just as well find themselves caught in the crossfire.

3.2. Analysis and ethics statement

The findings and discussion that follow are based on our individual field notes and observations. Throughout the conduct of the two studies, we regularly met online—in addition to one in-person meeting at the end of the second study—to discuss any research-related challenges we encountered. In writing this article, we arrived at a consensus on how to collectively present those notes and observations, and the reflections they kindled. The direct quotations in this article were pulled out of transcribed interviews from the second study, in which strategies on state-led engagement with vulnerable communities were part of the discussions. Both studies followed protocols that were approved by the Ateneo de Manila University Research Ethics Committee (approval no. AdMUREC-19-061).

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. Redefining trust-building: accessing and recruiting participants

In conducting both studies, participant recruitment was our foremost challenge. Our experiences echoed the reflections of scholars who underscored the importance of trust-building in accessing vulnerable populations, especially for the purposes of engaging them in sensitive interviews ([Cornejo et al., 2023](#); [Lata, 2020](#)). In our case, we were not only recruiting participants who belonged to long-stigmatized communities in the Philippines and whose activities were explicitly criminalized by state policy; we were also recruiting them amid a pandemic that imposed unprecedented logistical restrictions.

Our success with participant recruitment for both studies could be attributed to two breakthroughs. The first was our engagement with gatekeepers of the target communities; with individuals or nonprofit organizations working with people who use drugs and/or living with HIV, and to a lesser extent, government agencies in public health. Some of these gatekeepers had worked with the first and third authors in their previous drug-related research, greatly enhancing the introductory networks of trust for our new studies. Here, our experiences aligned with those of international scholars who have pointed out how leveraging

these linkages is key to sustaining research mobility despite the pandemic's curtailments ([Bhatia et al., 2022](#); [Cornejo et al., 2023](#); [Hoeflich et al., 2022](#)). In our case, the gatekeepers not only helped us find participants; they also served as guarantors of our studies, in a sense ‘legitimizing’ our attempts to penetrate the target communities by assuring potential participants it would be safe to be interviewed by us. This collaborative strategy facilitated a vetting process and installed a safeguard measure that ran both ways—for us researchers to be able to reach genuine participants, and for potential participants to ensure their participation would not compromise their privacy and safety. Through these networks of trust, we were able to commence a snowball system of recruitment for both studies and, more significantly, had an easier time recruiting participants for the second study, as we reengaged some participants from the first, given the overlapping topics.

Our second breakthrough came with the use of online and virtual communication platforms for recruitment. This was particularly crucial for our first study (on chemsex): Despite introductions from gatekeepers and referrals from initial participants, our snowball system came to a halt. So, we turned to social media and unexpectedly found more efficient engagement after advertising our study on Twitter: In the online community known as ‘alter’, where users post primarily sexual content through anonymous accounts, Filipino chemsex practitioners apparently comprise a sub-community themselves ([Cao, 2021](#); [Piamonte et al., 2020](#)). Of the almost 60 individuals who expressed interest in our study or were referred by a participant, more than half contacted us after seeing our advertisement. To approximate the dynamics of in-person conversations, we endeavored to communicate with potential participants (e.g., via direct messaging on Twitter to explain study objectives) using a more casual and personalized approach, allowing us to establish familiarity, intimacy, and rapport before the actual interview while also enabling a two-way vetting system where both participant and researcher got to know each other. Asynchronicity, in a way, was also more advantageous for our participants, as it gave them extra time to digest information about the study, forward their concerns, and build trust toward the researchers ([Hoeflich et al., 2022](#); [Newman et al., 2021](#); [S. Williams et al., 2012](#)).

Still, there were downsides to online recruitment. Already mentioned was the difficulty of sustaining the snowball system, demonstrating how peer referrals or respondent-driven sampling is prone to unpredictability; how referrals from trusted sources can still end up not participating for a variety of reasons. More importantly, relying on the social networks of the participants themselves was itself limiting: It confined participation to the social circles of previous participants, effectively excluding many others. In our chemsex study, the participants were largely cis-gender men who have sex with men, who identified as middle or upper middle class and lived in the capital region of Metro Manila—precisely because our initial interviewees belonged to these demographics and referred their friends or acquaintances to us. Here, the necessity of working with gatekeepers became evident: In the second study, we were able to involve participants from more diverse geographical and socioeconomic backgrounds by working with more gatekeepers across the country.

4.2. Redefining intimacy: conducting the virtual interview

Scholars have pointed out how online qualitative research redefines the spatiotemporality of relationship-building between researchers and participants ([Miles, 2020](#)); how diminished physical interaction from the use of remote modalities can take away the ‘human-ness’ in rapport-building ([Glogowska et al., 2011](#); [Reñosa et al., 2021](#); [Shuy et al., 2003](#)). However, many of our participants said they actually felt safer participating in our studies through online or phone interviews, and found it easier to divulge intimate details that they otherwise would not have shared in in-person interviews. The idea of ‘safety’, in this case, was expressed by our participants in two ways. First, there was ‘physical safety’, or being able to talk openly about their drug use without

worrying about the drug war-related and legal consequences of such a public admission (e.g., being reported to the authorities, possible arrest). Given these security-related concerns, we always stressed the importance of anonymity to each participant prior to their interview. Our interlocutors were briefed that, for interviews on platforms with video options (e.g., Zoom), they were not obliged to turn on their cameras; that communication could be strictly via audio only. As one participant from the second study noted, the distance created through the use of remote methodologies was game-changing:

I don't think you can just meet people [who use drugs] like me in person and invite them to an interview—because they wouldn't trust you unless you already knew each other. I guess online interviews work better if you don't know each other on a personal level; at the very least, you can't see each other.

Second was 'emotional safety', in which participants allowed themselves to open up and become vulnerable in what they perceived to be a 'safe space'. A number of our participants mirrored the sentiments of those in Sam Miles' (2020) study in telling us that their interview was actually the first time they talked about their drug use to another person. The anonymity between participant and researcher was apparently helpful, as one participant noted: "In online interviews like this, I actually feel safer sharing confidential information about myself to a stranger like you."

Beyond feelings of safety, the shift to the virtual field afforded our participants more freedom and agency to co-construct how, where, and when the research took place—which seldom happens in in-person encounters where researchers tend to be more actively in control (Elwood & Martin, 2000). Certainly, the technological exclusions of online research that other scholars have elucidated also figured in our studies (Azad et al., 2021; Hoeflich et al., 2022; Newman et al., 2021). While online communication allowed us to transcend geographical boundaries (a definite advantage, given the country's archipelagic nature) and conduct interviews more flexibly in terms of time and venue, it precluded the technologically illiterate and materially disadvantaged from participating. Mindful of the sensitive nature of our topics, we specifically asked participants to situate themselves in a secure, private room or area during the interview, and to use their own devices and accounts—consequently excluding the less privileged with access to neither. Toward those who ended up participating, we therefore made conscious efforts to be more flexible by letting them select the interview platform and adjusting to their availability (in a number of cases, conducting interviews during weekends or in the evenings, when some of them felt safer or had more privacy) (Bhatia et al., 2022; Hoeflich et al., 2022; Newman et al., 2021). This autonomy to co-construct the interview 'safe space' evidently encouraged our participants to be more truthful and unguarded during interviews, as one participant disclosed:

With online interviews, I can decide where to place myself. I can freely choose a space where I know I will feel safe so I can be a lot more honest during the interview. [Being interviewed] in a public place, say, a coffee shop, [puts me at] risk of being heard by other people, that I don't think I would be as comfortable as I am now.

Meanwhile, the blunted 'human-ness' in constructing intimacy during the virtual interview meant we as researchers had to make particular sensorial adjustments: working on our active listening skills, learning to gauge the participant's demeanor based only on the tone of their voice, relying on 'non-words' (Webber-Ritchey et al., 2021) to make our presence known, and learning to sustain their interest while navigating their silences by quickly formulating follow-up questions to keep the conversation going (Abad Espinoza, 2022; Reñosa et al., 2021; Webber-Ritchey et al., 2021). Aside from these sensorial adjustments, we also encountered technical difficulties such as problems with internet connection or audio quality. During the second study, the first and second authors separately experienced making repeated phone calls just to continue interviews with participants who were having connectivity

problems; the recordings of these calls had to then be pieced together during transcription for coherence. Additionally, it could also be mentally taxing to listen to the participants' emotionally charged stories. Thus, while using remote modalities made data collection more efficient, we had to individually limit ourselves to a maximum of three interviews per day to safeguard our own mental health. Overall, we found these sensorial, technical, and emotional challenges that came with doing virtual interviews to be demanding—in some cases, even resulting to experiences of "Zoom fatigue" or technological exhaustion from conducting remote work (Luebstorff et al., 2023; Tuan Anh et al., 2022).

Establishing intimacy and good rapport with people who use drugs in the Philippines has always been tricky for researchers. After all, the research topic is taboo, widely regarded as a moral and social evil, and its open discussion could very well get the participants arrested or even killed. Among other measures, simple precautions like obtaining consent verbally (instead of through written forms) and not requiring our participants to turn on their video during interviews were in effect not only a means of adapting to the demands of virtual research; they also helped reduce stigma by providing people with safe spaces to talk about drug use more and enabled 'power sharing' in our research (Wilson & Neville, 2009). In imagining a future where virtual research and long-distance researcher-participant socialization will be part of the norm (Keen et al., 2022), such adjustments will surely be a necessity, as researchers learn not only to "[think in] extended temporalities" (Abad Espinoza, 2022, para. 35), but also to sense and discern in them.

4.3. Redefining vulnerability: issues of compensation and distrust

In this third section, we talk about two issues related to the concept of vulnerability that arose during the course of our studies. Earlier, we discussed vulnerability in terms of participants opening up and allowing researchers into the most intimate parts of their lives, underscoring the need for 'emotionally engaged' methodologies (Butcher, 2022). But we also wish to highlight the very tangible, socio-material dimensions of vulnerability related to our participants' experiences.

The first concerns the issue of compensation that arose during the second study. Notwithstanding protocol adjustments to ensure the participants' privacy at all times, we still had to comply with administrative requirements in relation to funding, including a thorough documentation of the provision of tokens. With our largely remote methodology, compensation was provided virtually through electronic or e-wallets or, to a lesser extent, bank transfers. In the Philippines, the most widely used mobile phone-dependent e-wallet across all sectors appears to be GCash. When our study took place, GCash had yet to implement a security feature that heavily redacted an account holder's name during transactions (see CNN Philippines Staff, 2022), which meant that, despite our efforts to anonymize our participants, we still gained access to their real names. In fact, some participants opted to forego receiving compensation precisely because they wanted to keep their identities private. On the other hand, we also had participants who did not have access to e-wallets, let alone a bank account, in which case they had to borrow other people's accounts to receive compensation—in this way, also exposing themselves to safety risks and privacy breaches.

The issue of compensating research participants has been widely discussed worldwide (Devlin et al., 2022; Gelinas et al., 2020; Head, 2009; Newman et al., 2021; Resnik, 2015; van Wijk & Harrison, 2013; E. P. Williams & Walter, 2015). Some have argued that the promise of compensation can be a form of 'undue influence', with individuals participating—coercively, in a sense—all for the sake of the material reward (Collins et al., 2017; see also van Wijk & Harrison, 2013; E. P. Williams & Walter, 2015). To borrow from Luke Gelinas et al. (2020), this may have become an even bigger concern during the pandemic, with many individuals in vulnerable circumstances—including some of our participants—having grappled with losing their jobs and other forms of socioeconomic hardship. Nonetheless, we concur with scholars who

have stressed the value of proper and fair compensation, especially when working with the vulnerable and marginalized (Abadie et al., 2019; Gelinas et al., 2020; Resnik, 2015). Far from being coercive, fair material compensation can make participants feel like valued research partners, undoubtedly enhancing their trust in the research itself (Resnik, 2015). Besides, as Amie Devlin et al. (2022) showed, apprehensions regarding ‘coercion’ among participants may be unfounded: Even low-income individuals engage in deliberate risk-benefit analyses before committing to joining a study, and the promise of material reward is only one of many factors they consider.

All this brings into question current practices in the country, which we also adopted. In both studies, we pegged compensation at PHP 300 (around USD 6), following longtime practices of the local, qualitative research community and the recommendation of the ethics board that approved our study protocols. However, some potential participants actually refused to participate because they deemed the offered compensation insufficient—a justifiable position, we admit. For the time and effort people expend in participating, for the expenses and opportunity costs they incur, and, most especially, for rendering themselves vulnerable to the researchers, fair compensation is nothing if not a form of justice in research.

A final issue concerns vulnerability in relation to the state, its political and legislative machinery, and the implications of this to the future of research among vulnerable populations in the country. In both studies, we encountered frequent suspicion from potential participants regarding the nature and motives of our study; suspicions that we may be mere informants for the state. While it is important for participants to know who their researchers are, in the case of our second study, it occasionally aggravated their distrust. In that study, we also elicited their insights regarding potential participation in a nationwide, government-sponsored behavioral survey to be conducted by the DOH, on top of informing them that the present study was being carried out in collaboration with that government department. Just knowing that the government was somehow involved in this study was enough for some individuals to retract their participation. Here, people’s distrust in the country’s institutions was very much evident; to varying degrees, distrust in the state also resulted in distrust in health and academic authorities, effectively restricting the two-way access between researchers and people in vulnerable circumstances. For our participants, vulnerability thus became two-fold: The ‘climate of fear’ (Warburg & Jensen, 2020) engendered by the drug war was further compounded by the climate of health-related precarity induced by the pandemic.

Conversely, the vulnerability—and safety—of researchers is just as much of a concern. For us and the few others who conduct research among people who use drugs in the country, the war on drugs has become a constant, potentially life-threatening concern. As the third author wrote previously (Lasco, 2018b), embarking on this field of study means running the risk not only of endangering one’s interlocutors, but also of being ‘mistaken’ as a member of the state-targeted community itself. While the shift to virtual research had its share of difficulties, we cannot deny the striking difference brought about by our removal from the physical field in terms of our own feelings of security: Suddenly, we no longer had to think about literal, physical threats to our safety, making it, to a degree, less worrisome to conduct the two studies.

5. Conclusion

A three-point parting note, then: First, in researching vulnerable populations, it is vital to maintain relationships on the ground. Of course, these relationships can affect the kinds of individuals we end up engaging, which means we should be ever cognizant of the need for reflexivity in resorting to these networks of trust. While the importance of building and maintaining relationships with gatekeepers and, indeed, entire vulnerable communities has been well-established, we want to emphasize that in settings like the Philippines, where these communities have been disproportionately persecuted, such pre-existing relationships

can literally spell the difference between research success and failure. Next, just compensation is essential in engaging people in vulnerable circumstances. On this note, researchers, as well as their funders and institutional review boards, would do well to reexamine current compensation practices and move toward adjusting the values accordingly. This would not only show our appreciation and respect for people’s experiential knowledge and expertise (Collins et al., 2017), but would also be a way of recognizing the material realities of doing research; of recognizing that people incur particular costs to participate in a study and must therefore be compensated congruously (Gelinas et al., 2020). Lastly, there is a need to safeguard the independence of academic and scientific bodies from the state and its associated machinery. We say this as researchers from the Philippines who have encountered distrust from members of the vulnerable communities we wished to study, but this also applies to researchers from other parts of the world. In fact, this may be the most urgent point: Throughout the pandemic—and even prior to it—we have witnessed scientific and public health authorities come under attack from both the populist governments that are supposed to work with them and the ordinary people they are supposed to serve (Lasco, 2020). Absent that—which is to say, when we fail to earn the trust of the communities we wish to study—the vulnerable will always be beyond the reach of any research endeavor, whether in-person or online.

Funding

The authors received no funding in relation to the writing of this article.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

References

- Abad Espinoza, L. G. (2022). The ethnographic quest in the midst of COVID-19. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 21, Article 160940692211359. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069221135967>
- Abadie, R., Brown, B., & Fisher, C. B. (2019). “Money helps”: People who inject drugs and their perceptions of financial compensation and its ethical implications. *Ethics & Behavior*, 29(8), 607–620. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10508422.2018.1535976>
- Aguilar, M. V. G., Agustin, J. Z. C., Bautista, I. D., Gamueda, S. F., Linesses, E. F., Mujal, R. M., & Relopez, J. A. (2021). *Gleanings from the field: Navigating research through difficult times*. Academia Lasalliana Journal of Education and Humanities.
- Aligato, M. F., Endoma, V., Wachinger, J., Landicho-Guevarra, J., Bravo, T. A., Guevarra, J. R., Landicho, J., McMahon, S. A., & Reñosa, M. D. C. (2021). ‘Unfocused groups’: Lessons learnt amid remote focus groups in the Philippines. *Family Medicine and Community Health*, 9(Suppl 1), Article e001098. <https://doi.org/10.1136/fmch-2021-001098>
- Azad, A., Sembo, E., Svård, V., Holmlund, L., & Björk Brämberg, E. (2021). Conducting in-depth interviews via mobile phone with persons with common mental disorders and multimorbidity: The challenges and advantages as experienced by participants and researchers. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(22), Article 11828. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph182211828>
- Baah, F. O., Teitelman, A. M., & Riegel, B. (2019). Marginalization: Conceptualizing patient vulnerabilities in the framework of social determinants of health—an integrative review. *Nursing Inquiry*, 26(1), Article e12268. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nin.12268>
- Bhatia, A., Turner, E., Akim, A., Mirembe, A., Nakuti, J., Parkes, J., Datzberger, S., Nagawa, R., Kung’u, M., Babu, H., Kabuti, R., Kimani, J., Beattie, T. S., d’Oliveira, A. F., Rishal, P., Nyakuwa, R., Bell, S., Bukuluki, P., Cislighi, B., ... Devries, K. (2022). Remote methods for research on violence against women and children: Lessons and challenges from research during the COVID-19 pandemic. *BMJ Global Health*, 7(11), Article e008460. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2022-008460>
- Bourne, A., Reid, D., Hickson, F., Rueda, S. T., & Weatherburn, P. (2014). *The chemsex study: Drug use in sexual settings among gay and bisexual men in Lambeth, Southwark & Lewisham*. Sigma research. London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. <https://researchonline.lshtm.ac.uk/id/eprint/2197245/1/report2014a.pdf>.
- Butcher, M. (2022). Qualitative research methods I: Emotionally engaged approaches to working with vulnerable participants. *Progress in Human Geography*, 46(3), 907–914. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03091325221083212>

- Cao, R. J. D. (2021). Amateur porn in Filipino Twitter alter community: Affordances, commodification, ghettoization, and gay masculinity. *Media International Australia*, 179(1), 52–65. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X211002845>
- CNN Philippines Staff. (2022). *GCash rolls out new anonymity feature, assures no data breach in system*. CNN Philippines. <https://www.cnnphilippines.com/business/2022/9/8/GCash-anonymous-name-feature-text-scam.html>.
- Cohen, S. (1972). Folk devils and moral panics: The creation of the mods and rockers. *MacGibbon and Kee*.
- Collins, A. B., Strike, C., Guta, A., Turje, R. B., McDougall, P., Parashar, S., & McNeil, R. (2017). “We’re giving you something so we get something in return”: Perspectives on research participation and compensation among people living with HIV who use drugs. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 39, 92–98. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2016.09.004>
- Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002. (2002). *Republic Act No. 9165, 12th congress of the Philippines, 1st*. https://lawphil.net/statutes/repacts/ra2002/ra_9165_2002.html.
- Cornejo, M., Bustamante, J., Del Río, M., De Toro, X., & Latorre, M. S. (2023). Researching with qualitative methodologies in the time of Coronavirus: Clues and challenges. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 22, Article 160940692211501. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069221150110>
- Devlin, A., Brownstein, K., Goodwin, J., Gibeau, E., Pardes, M., Grunwald, H., & Fisher, S. (2022). “Who is going to put their life on the line for a dollar? That’s crazy”: Community perspectives of financial compensation in clinical research. *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 48(4), 261–265. <https://doi.org/10.1136/medethics-2020-106715>
- Dow, B. S., & Boylan, B. M. (2020). Learning from vulnerable populations: Methodological implications of interviewing individuals with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 19, Article 160940692093125. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920931254>
- Drysdale, K., Bryant, J., Hopwood, M., Dowsett, G. W., Holt, M., Lea, T., Aggleton, P., & Treloar, C. (2020). Destabilising the ‘problem’ of chemsex: Diversity in settings, relations and practices revealed in Australian gay and bisexual men’s crystal methamphetamine use. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 78, Article 102697. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2020.102697>
- Dunlap, E., Johnson, B., Sanabria, H., Holliday, E., Lipsey, V., Barnett, M., Hopkins, W., Sobel, I., Randolph, D., & Chin, K.-L. (1990). Studying crack users and their criminal careers: The scientific and artistic aspects of locating hard-to-reach subjects and interviewing them about sensitive topics. *Contemporary Drug Problems*, 17(1), 121–144.
- Elwood, S. A., & Martin, D. G. (2000). “Placing” interviews: Location and scales of power in qualitative research. *The Professional Geographer*, 52(4), 649–657. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0033-0124.00253>
- Gelinas, L., White, S. A., & Bierer, B. E. (2020). Economic vulnerability and payment for research participation. *Clinical Trials*, 17(3), 264–272. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1740774520905596>
- Glogowska, M., Young, P., & Lockyer, L. (2011). Propriety, process and purpose: Considerations of the use of the telephone interview method in an educational research study. *Higher Education*, 62(1), 17–26. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-010-9362-2>
- Head, E. (2009). The ethics and implications of paying participants in qualitative research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 12(4), 335–344. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645570802246724>
- Hoeflich, C. C., Wang, A., Otufowora, A., Cottler, L. B., & Striley, C. W. (2022). Virtual recruitment and participant engagement for substance use research during a pandemic. *Current Opinion in Psychiatry*, 35(4), 252–258. <https://doi.org/10.1097/YCO.0000000000000794>
- Howlett, M. (2022). Looking at the ‘field’ through a Zoom lens: Methodological reflections on conducting online research during a global pandemic. *Qualitative Research*, 22(3), 387–402. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794120985691>
- Keen, S., Lomeli-Rodriguez, M., & Joffe, H. (2022). From challenge to opportunity: Virtual qualitative research during COVID-19 and beyond. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 21, Article 160940692211050. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069221105075>
- Keikelame, M. J., & Swartz, L. (2019). Decolonising research methodologies: Lessons from a qualitative research project, Cape Town, South Africa. *Global Health Action*, 12(1), Article 1561175. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16549716.2018.1561175>
- King, D. B., O’Rourke, N., & DeLongis, A. (2014). Social media recruitment and online data collection: A beginner’s guide and best practices for accessing low-prevalence and hard-to-reach populations. *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie Canadienne*, 55(4), 240–249. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038087>
- Koehler, K., Schierenbeck, I., Saliba, I., Lust, E. M., & Grimm, J. J. (2020). *Safer field research in the social sciences: A guide to human and digital security in hostile environments*. SAGE Publications.
- Konken, L. C., & Howlett, M. (2022). When “home” becomes the “field”: Ethical considerations in digital and remote fieldwork. *Perspectives on Politics*, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592722002572>
- Lambert, E. Y., & Wiebel, W. W. (1990). Introduction. In E. Y. Lambert (Ed.), *The collection and interpretation of data from hidden populations* (pp. 1–3). National Institute on Drug Abuse.
- Lasco, G. (2014). *Pampagilas*: Methamphetamine in the everyday economic lives of underclass male youths in a Philippine port. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 25(4), 783–788. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2014.06.011>
- Lasco, G. (2018a). Call boys: Drug use and sex work among marginalized young men in a Philippine port community. *Contemporary Drug Problems*, 45(1), 33–46. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0091450917742052>
- Lasco, G. (2018b). They might mistake you for an “informant”: Anthropology in the time of the Philippine drug war. *Medicine Anthropology Theory*, 5(5), 88–97. <https://doi.org/10.1157/mat.5.5.573>
- Lasco, G. (2020). Medical populism and the COVID-19 pandemic. *Global Public Health*, 15(10), 1417–1429. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2020.1807581>
- Lasco, G. (Ed.). (2021a). *Drugs and Philippine society*. Ateneo de Manila University Press.
- Lasco, G. (2021b). Living with *tokhang*: Mistrust and fear in a drug war-affected community in the Philippines. In G. Lasco (Ed.), *Drugs and Philippine society* (pp. 140–154). Ateneo de Manila University Press.
- Lasco, G., & Yu, V. G. (2023a). *Pampalibog: Chemsex, desire and pleasure in the Philippines*. Culture, Health & Sexuality. Advanced online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2023.2192256>
- Lasco, G., & Yu, V. G. (2023b). Taking flight: Narratives, logistics, and risks of chemsex scenes in the Philippines. *The Journal of Sex Research*. Advanced online publication. doi: 10.1080/00224499.2023.2197426.
- Lasco, G., & Yu, V. G. (2023c). Neither legal nor illegal: Poppers as “acceptable” chemsex drugs among men who have sex with men in the Philippines. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 104004. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2023.104004>
- Lata, L. N. (2020). Negotiating gatekeepers and positionality in building trust for accessing the urban poor in the Global South. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 21(1), 76–86. <https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-03-2020-0017>
- Luebstorff, S., Allen, J. A., Eden, E., Kramer, W. S., Reiter-Palmon, R., & Lehmann-Willenbrock, N. (2023). Digging into “Zoom fatigue”: A qualitative exploration of remote work challenges and virtual meeting stressors. *Meri*, 3(1), 151–166. <https://doi.org/10.3390/merits3010010>
- Luna, F. (2022). *PNP chief: 46 killed in “war on drugs” operations under Marcos*. *The Philippine star*. <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2022/11/14/2223749/pnp-chief-46-killed-war-drugs-operations-under-marcos>.
- Maulod, A., Rouse, S., Lee, A., Ravindran, M., Mohamad, H., Goh, V., Azman, D., Low, L. L., Malhotra, R., & Chan, A. (2022). Ethics of participation and social inclusion of older persons in research: Lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic in Singapore. *Health Research Policy and Systems*, 20(S1), 126. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12961-022-00930-2>
- Miles, S. (2020). “I’ve never told anyone this before”: Co-constructing intimacy in sex and sexualities research. *Area*, 52(1), 73–80. <https://doi.org/10.1111/area.12550>
- Miller, P. G., & Sønderlund, A. L. (2010). Using the internet to research hidden populations of illicit drug users: A review. *Addiction*, 105(9), 1557–1567. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1360-0443.2010.02992.x>
- Møller, K., & Hakim, J. (2021). Critical chemsex studies: Interrogating cultures of sexualized drug use beyond the risk paradigm. *Sexualities*, 136346072110262. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13634607211026223>
- Narag, R., & Maxwell, S. R. (2014). Understanding cultural context when collecting field data: Lessons learned from field research in a slum area in the Philippines. *Qualitative Research*, 14(3), 311–326. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794112473496>
- Newman, P. A., Guta, A., & Black, T. (2021). Ethical considerations for qualitative research methods during the COVID-19 pandemic and other emergency situations: Navigating the virtual field. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 20, Article 160940692110478. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211047823>
- O’Sullivan, T. L., & Phillips, K. P. (2019). From SARS to pandemic influenza: The framing of high-risk populations. *Natural Hazards*, 98(1), 103–117. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11069-019-03584-6>
- Owton, H., & Allen-Collinson, J. (2014). Close but not too close: Friendship as method (ology) in ethnographic research encounters. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 43(3), 283–305. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241613495410>
- Philippine Department of Health-Epidemiology Bureau. (2020). *A briefer on the Philippine HIV estimates 2020*. Department of Health. https://doh.gov.ph/sites/default/files/publications/A%20Briefer%20on%20the%20PH%20Estimates%202020_08232021.pdf.
- Piamonte, S. B. H., Quintos, M. A. M., & Iwayama, M. O. (2020). Virtual masquerade: Understanding the role of Twitter’s alter community in the social and sexual engagements of men who have sex with men. *Banwa*, 13, art048.
- Quinn, C. R. (2015). General considerations for research with vulnerable populations: Ten lessons for success. *Health & Justice*, 3(1), 1. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40352-014-0013-z>
- Reñosa, M. D. C., Mwamba, C., Meghani, A., West, N. S., Hariyani, S., Ddaaki, W., Sharma, A., Beres, L. K., & McMahon, S. (2021). Selfie consents, remote rapport, and Zoom debriefings: Collecting qualitative data amid a pandemic in four resource-constrained settings. *BMJ Global Health*, 6(1), Article e004193. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2020-004193>
- Resnik, D. (2015). Bioethical issues in providing financial incentives to research participants. *Medicolegal and Bioethics*, 35. <https://doi.org/10.2147/MB.S70416>
- Roberts, J. K., Pavlakis, A. E., & Richards, M. P. (2021). It’s more complicated than it seems: Virtual qualitative research in the COVID-19 era. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 20, Article 160940692110029. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211002959>
- Salma, J., & Giri, D. (2021). Engaging immigrant and racialized communities in community-based participatory research during the COVID-19 pandemic: Challenges and opportunities. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 20, Article 160940692110362. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211036293>
- Schroeder, S., Bourne, A., Doyle, J., Hellard, M., Stooev, M., & Pedrana, A. (2022). Constructing a ‘target population’: A critical analysis of public health discourse on substance use among gay and bisexual men, 2000–2020. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 108, Article 103808. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2022.103808>
- Shuy, R. W., Holstein, J. A., & Gubrium, J. F. (2003). In-person versus telephone interviewing. In *Inside interviewing: New lenses, new concerns* (pp. 175–193). SAGE Publications.

- Tan, M. L. (1995). The construction of “drug abuse” in the Philippines: The case of cough preparations. *Philippine Sociological Review*, 43(1/4), 17–42. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23898531>.
- Teti, M., Schatz, E., & Liebenberg, L. (2020). Methods in the time of COVID-19: The vital role of qualitative inquiries. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 19, Article 160940692092096. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920920962>
- Thummapol, O., Park, T., Jackson, M., & Barton, S. (2019). Methodological challenges faced in doing research with vulnerable women: Reflections from fieldwork experiences. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 18, Article 160940691984302. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919843022>
- Tuan Anh, L. E., Whelan, E., & Umair, A. (2022). ‘You’re still on mute.’ A study of video conferencing fatigue during the COVID-19 pandemic from a technostress perspective. *Behaviour & Information Technology*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144929X.2022.2095304>. Advanced online publication.
- Tuliao, A. P. (2021). Public and private stigma, and help-seeking intent for mental health issues: A cross-country comparison between the U.S. And Philippines. *Stigma and Health*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/sah0000296>
- Warburg, A. B., & Jensen, S. (2020). Ambiguous fear in the war on drugs: A reconfiguration of social and moral orders in the Philippines. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 51(1–2), 5–24. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463420000211>
- Webber-Ritchey, K. J., Simonovich, S. D., & Spurlark, R. S. (2021). COVID-19: Qualitative research with vulnerable populations. *Nursing Science Quarterly*, 34(1), 13–19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894318420965225>
- Wiebel, W. W. (1990). Identifying and gaining access to hidden populations. In E. Y. Lambert (Ed.), *The collection and interpretation of data from hidden populations* (pp. 4–11). National Institute on Drug Abuse.
- van Wijk, E., & Harrison, T. (2013). Managing ethical problems in qualitative research involving vulnerable populations, using a pilot study. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 12(1), 570–586. <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940691301200130>
- Williams, S., Clausen, M. G., Robertson, A., Peacock, S., & McPherson, K. (2012). Methodological reflections on the use of asynchronous online focus groups in health research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 11(4), 368–383. <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940691201100405>
- Williams, E. P., & Walter, J. K. (2015). When does the amount we pay research participants become “undue influence”. *AMA Journal of Ethics*, 17(12), 1116–1121. <https://doi.org/10.1001/journalofethics.2015.17.12.ecas2-1512>
- Wilson, D., & Neville, S. (2009). Culturally safe research with vulnerable populations. *Contemporary Nurse*, 33(1), 69–79. <https://doi.org/10.5172/conu.33.1.69>
- Winfield, T. P. (2022). Vulnerable research: Competencies for trauma and justice-informed ethnography. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 51(2), 135–170. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08912416211017254>
- Witham, G., Beddow, A., & Haigh, C. (2015). Reflections on access: Too vulnerable to research? *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 20(1), 28–37. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987113499338>
- Yarcia, L. E. P. (2021). It’s time to decriminalize drug use: Insights from the legal history of prohibition in the Philippines. In G. Lasco (Ed.), *Drugs and Philippine society* (pp. 298–317). Ateneo de Manila University Press.