

Panel reference and title:

P025: Ethical concerns: Envisioning ethnographic fieldwork across generations with cognitively impaired people [Joint panel: Age and Generations Network and Medical Anthropology Young Scholars Network]

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Paper title: The “Good” and the “Right”.

Ethical concerns of implementing ECD as inclusive methodology for children living with cognitive development deficit in rural Africa.

Short Abstract

This work analyses ethical concerns related to the implementation of an innovative *Early Child Development* based strategy within the fight of chronic malnutrition in rural contexts in UNICEF funded programs.

The theoretical framework of social anthropology allows to emerge and going across dilemmas related to the field work on sensitive issues re-structuring the cultural acceptability of the diversity.

Full abstract

Combating childhood malnutrition in rural Africa exposes the humanitarian worker and social anthropologist to a complex dynamic in which scientific rigor, the need for investigation and data collection are grafted onto the professional ethics and discretion of the person.

Fieldwork is practiced with children often victims of complicated delivery and / or with cognitive delays due to chronic malnutrition and with their families, often mothers with no schooling experience. The operator finds himself to reveal and negotiate sensibilities, meanings, a-priori mental patterns to play them in the daily relationship with the interested communities.

Ethical attention therefore goes beyond the didactic sharing of methods, tools and results, to become an essential dimension of the work itself, an element that innervates the practice and intimate knowledge of anthropology work and the humanitarian impulse.

Personally, I found that in these delicate settings, talking about myself, about my and my family's frailties builds a common ground, a shared language, a rebalancing of experiences that has a positive practical impact on the response of families to the proposed work and therefore on outcomes and on the quality of the collected information.

Re-directing anthropological work on the basis of exchange and not only and no longer solely as extrapolation of meanings allows the communities involved to contextualize their personal critical situation (the child with deficit, malnourished, sometimes socially stigmatized), re-structure their symbolic and social contents and elaborate strategies of acceptance, coexistence and resilience.

In rural Tanzania, where about a third of children are potentially affected by delay in cognitive development, the intervention of Doctors with Africa CUAMM and UNICEF in the southern regions aimed at sensory stimulation impacts hundreds of thousands of families. Recognizing and crossing the ethical dilemma with appropriateness becomes therefore an essential tool of the toolbox of the social anthropologist, bringing the question of the ethics of the intervention back to the centre of the scientific debate, to become epistemologically the key to interpret the results of its own research.