Recruiting Men for a Study Exploring First-Time Father’s Involvement in Pregnancy and Childbirth: Reflections From Fieldwork Conducted in Nigeria

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Abstract
While participant recruitment and qualitative interviewing are very crucial in data collection, researchers must be mindful of cultural contexts to ensure quality outcomes. This article explores the methodological and personal challenges encountered while recruiting and interviewing men in a research study. It addresses the influence of ‘who you know’ and researcher’s flexibility in negotiating one’s way while conducting fieldwork in African contexts. I describe the initial plan to recruit men only from health settings and why that failed. Then I outline other options explored and describe my encounters entering male-dominated workspaces. Additionally, I describe the recruitment strategy in the rural communities that resulted in my locating more engaged participants and having more extended interviews. Finally, I draw on my experiences to share some lessons learnt in the process and coping strategies that may be interesting for social researchers in similar dilemmas.

Keywords
qualitative research methods, flexibility, fieldwork reflections, qualitative interviewing, patriarchy, male recruitment

Introduction
Recruiting and conducting interviews with men as a female researcher has been described as challenging and time-consuming (Kristensen & Ravn, 2015). It is challenging because female researchers often have to work very hard to make a good impression, unlike their male counterparts (Gurney, 1985); slow because it usually takes time to fit into the stereotypical cultural roles and gain acceptance. The literature has raised meaningful discussions on gender and interviewing (Haddow, 2021; Monahan & Fisher, 2015; Poulton, 2012); providing explanations about its influences on the interviewer and interviewee and the role of environmental context in amplifying these influences (Lee, 1997; Pini, 2005; Vogels, 2019; Lefkowich, 2019). Research articles have also highlighted the awkward situation female researchers are sometimes placed in, while engaging with male interviewees in the field. (Allen, 2005; Gailey & Prohaska, 2011; Pini, 2005; Soyer, 2014). For instance, Pini (2005) describes how her male interviewees displayed their heterosexual, busy, powerful and ‘know it all’ personalities in intimidating ways during her interview sessions (Pini, 2005). Lohan (2000) had to role-play as a friend and a respectful listener when collecting data in different contexts in her interactions with her male interviewees (Lohan, 2000, p. 175)). Also, the literature reveals instances of female researchers, facing the dilemma of how to appear before their male interviewees in order not to attract undue sexual advances (Lee, 1997). In short, men have been described as difficult to recruit (Butera, 2006; Ryan et al., 2019). This article contributes to these methodological discussions by detailing my own experiences in navigating a patriarchal culture as a female researcher to recruit and conduct interviews with men.

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In this article, I discuss the challenges and breakthroughs in recruiting and interviewing men for a qualitative research study (Onyeze-Joe & Godin, 2020). While the primary aim of the study was to explore the first-time father’s involvement in pregnancy and childbirth, I encountered contextual challenges during the recruitment process and in the actual interview with the men. Recruiting men for the study in urban clinical settings was unsuccessful because most of the men said they had work engagements. With this significant setback, modifications were made to the initial plan; these involved entering other locations where men could be found, such as offices, churches, pubs and marketplaces. I will discuss my experiences in such urban work settings, especially in gaining access to the bosses (men) of the organisations I visited. In rural settings, gaining the attention of local entrepreneurs was equally challenging and I will explain measures employed in scaling over these hurdles.

Initial Methodology Versus Reality

The research project on which this paper is based explored first-time fathers’ involvement in pregnancy and childbirth in urban and rural South-east Nigeria. It sought to explore the perceptions of first-time fathers regarding their roles in pregnancy and childbirth, allowing them to share their experiences and opinions from the onset of pregnancy until delivery. This study was inspired by the observation that men who are key decision-makers within the family are often ignorant about their roles in providing the desired support during pregnancy and childbirth (Yargawa & Leonardi-Bee, 2015). Research has shown that informed fathers provide better support for their spouses and are better prepared to adjust to the changes fatherhood brings (Onyeze-Joe & Godin, 2020). However, this is not how masculinity is constructed in most Nigerian communities; instead, the value of a man is often attached to him being the sole economic breadwinner in the family. Hence, most men make work their top priority over other important responsibilities such as their involvement in pregnancy, childbirth and fatherhood (Maseke et al., 2017; Onyeze-Joe & Godin, 2020). The methodology was designed to understand first-time fathers’ experiences, perceptions, knowledge and needs and how this impacted their participation during pregnancy and childbirth.

The initial plan was to recruit men from a variety of professions and sociocultural backgrounds in clinical settings: public servants and entrepreneurs, educated and uneducated, rural and urban dwellers, including the religious and the irreligious. To fulfil the study objectives, adopting a one-to-one interview technique was considered appropriate because it could offer each participant the opportunity to discuss their experiences freely without peer influences or towering opinions from strong responders, something seen in most group interview formats (e.g. focus group interviews) (Vogels, 2019). In their article, F. Ryan et al., (2009), discuss three broad viewpoints that should be considered in a one-on-one interview process: (a) the interview process, (b) the roles of the interviewer and interviewee and (c) interviewing in challenging situations. In applying these concepts, I was prepared to both listen to and observe the non-verbal interaction with each participant during the interview process. In so doing, I hoped to catch other non-verbal cues they expressed, most of which I have attempted to provide explanations for in this article.

Although time was spent gleaning methodological research materials, the methodological challenges of this research process were not obvious at the time of planning. Before data collection, I had envisaged some challenges from the start. First, I was concerned about obtaining timely access from the directors in charge of the obstetrics and gynaecology department of the hospital. Without their consent, this study would not commence on time. Getting this form of approval without a gatekeeper could take many futile days of waiting. Secondly, because this is not a funded study, I was concerned about finding quality participants who would be willing to participate in this study without monetary compensation for their time. By the end of the first month, neither of these problems mattered much compared to the more significant challenge arising because of the scarcity of male participants in the health settings.

Finding Male Interviewees in Female-Dominated Urban Clinical Settings

In research studies exploring male involvement in maternal health care in developed countries and sub-Saharan African settings, researchers have reported recruiting men in hospital settings (Eggermont et al., 2017; Kululanga et al., 2011; Maluka & Peneza, 2018; Maseke et al., 2017; Poh et al., 2014). Accordingly, this study was set on recruiting first-time fathers from hospital settings in both rural and urban zones. Even though not many men in sub-Saharan Africa regularly come to health settings, this study aimed at recruiting men who did. These plans were reinforced by knowledge from the literature that most first-time fathers are ignorant about pregnancy and the prediction that this would reflect on the number of curious first-time fathers who might accompany their spouses at least once to health settings. My supervisor and I were also aware of the selection bias of recruiting only this category of first-time fathers, who may already be more involved or concerned about pregnancy and birth. The target health setting in the urban area was the Federal Medical Centre (FMC), a well-attended federal hospital. We hoped to recruit about 30 men in this hospital and about 30 men from health centres in two rural communities: Amaba and Amuzukwu. A detailed methodological plan was presented to the Ministry of Health in Abia State to obtain permission to carry out this study. With the letter of consent obtained and essential interview materials in hand, I entered the field confident that all data would be collected in 2–3 months. Within this timeframe, about 60 interviews were achievable even if one or two men showed up daily in health facilities.
However, this plan did not go precisely as prearranged. At the end of the first 3 weeks of showing up daily at the obstetrics and gynaecology ward of FMC, only one successful interview was conducted with a soon-to-be father. Although I had other successful interviews with key health informants and women in this hospital, recruiting men, which was my primary focus for this study was largely unsuccessful. The antenatal clinics were primarily occupied by pregnant women and hospital staff, who were mostly women.

For this study to continue, there was a need to re-strategize the recruitment approach and explore male recruitment in other health facilities. Moving forward, recruiting first-time fathers from private hospitals that were highly recommended by pregnant women was included in the ‘plan B’. Considering that private hospitals were more individualised in their approach to care, I hoped to find more first-time fathers who might prefer coming to a private clinic than the seemingly overcrowded public hospital. Still, I faced the same challenge as in the public hospital: many pregnant women, few accompanying fathers.

Explaining the Absence of Men in Urban Clinical Settings

I was introduced to the chief nurse in the Obstetrics and Gynaecology (O&G) unit of the FMC by a retired nurse who had worked in this public hospital for over 35 years. Her introduction opened the door for me to carry on with my research in this public hospital. For 3 weeks, I worked with the nurses at the reception to assist pregnant women who came in for antenatal care at the O&G unit. While carrying out this duty, I engaged with the pregnant mothers to build trust and engage with any accompanying husbands. I observed men accompany their spouses to the maternity unit, turn back and leave. Although 10 men were invited to participate, only one successful interview occurred at the public hospital. Overall, the men did not consent to be interviewed at the facility or at a later time. Enquiring further into their unavailability, the main reasons given were centred around work. These responses were not out-of-context considering that the prevailing culture strongly affirms men as economic breadwinners (Achebe, 1996). Therefore, most men might be discouraged about participating in maternity clinical settings for fear of being labelled as jobless or lazy (Onyeze-Joe & Godin, 2020). Some fathers might also dread being tagged as a ‘woman wrapper’ or being perceived as less than an ‘ideal man’ if other men were to find them in such female-dominated contexts during work hours (Onyeze-Joe & Godin, 2020). As the dominant discourse in many African contexts is for men to spend more time working to provide for their families while domestic and care roles are accomplished by the female gender, adopting an involved stance publicly for a ‘feminised’ role is often difficult for many men. (Ampim et al., 2020; Matseke et al., 2017; Onyeze-Joe & Godin, 2020). Hence, dropping off their pregnant spouses could be the perceived acceptable support the men were comfortable offering within what is culturally allowed as a man’s show of support in a health care facility to avoid ridicule. In a different study context, a researcher observed that men were also unwilling to participate in her study due to their work demands. She acknowledges that men privileging work roles in society is a ploy that shelters them from making commitments or withholding from participating (Butera, 2006).

Exploring Recruitment Outside Clinical Settings

With these setbacks in my initial recruitment plan, I had to explore other urban and rural recruitment locations with the approval of my research supervisor as long as the research goals were maintained (CohenMiller et al., 2020). This form of flexibility has been described as ‘rigid flexibility’ because it gives room for creativity, ‘better thinking’ and allows researchers to explore new opportunities while maintaining firmly the research goals (CohenMiller et al., 2020; Shepherd et al., 2016).

In line with being flexible, the option of using key influencers and community leaders as some studies have suggested was considered. However, after weighing the pros and cons, I did not pursue this option further because these influencers were not easily reachable and there was no guarantee they would be willing to participate within our remaining timeframe. Besides, working with such influencers would require extra planning and execution costs, which was unbudgeted in this project. Moving forward, the study protocol was revised to include spontaneous recruitments in both rural and urban settings in any location men could be found: pubs, churches and marketplaces were promising locations because of the high possibility of finding diverse groups of first-time fathers with different socio-economic characteristics. Allowing this recruitment flexibility provided better opportunities for me as the interviewer and impacted the quality of interactions with potential participants. Elwood and Martin acknowledge the importance of interview locations in potentially shaping relationship dynamics between the interviewer and the interviewee, providing a deeper understanding of participant experiences beyond what is communicated and potentially influencing the flow of conversations (Elwood & Martin, 2000).

Recruitment in an urban pub was another option I was willing to explore because I was running out of time, one I now consider ambitious considering my familiarity with this cultural context coupled with my upbringing. While in the pub, surrounded by strong male presence and loud music, I felt very nervous about the types of men I might find. I felt tensed about meeting flirty men and being in the company of men under the influence of alcohol. My goal was to recruit them in the pubs and negotiate a venue and time for interviews at their convenience. It was difficult to judge which attitude was most appropriate to avoid any ambiguity about my presence and to obtain participation in my research interview. Reflecting on this recruitment location, though promising, I did not feel safe as a young woman to pursue my research objectives in this location. Considering that recruitments flourish more when
there is mutual understanding between interviewees and the interviewers, there is a possibility that the interviewees were not in the right frame of mind at the point of recruitment. Also, there is a possibility that dialogues made with potential interviewees might have been forgotten which could have placed the researcher in a difficult situation afterwards if informants did not remember being recruited. I choose to write about this recruitment attempt because some researchers might relate to this experience too. It is in our best interest to stay vigilant and carry on interviews in spaces we feel safe in (Bott, 2010).

Considering that many Nigerians are religious, it was logical to explore religious locations for recruitment. In both the urban and rural, recruitment in churches was explored. As anticipated, gaining access to the key leaders of a large urban cathedral I had selected was challenging. I had attempted to speed up access by telephoning people I knew in these churches, with their assistance, I was hoping to gain access to their leaders. Unfortunately, the key male leaders were busy with their work and families during the week. After Sunday meetings, they also had a line-up of other meetings that kept them engaged, making meetings unfeasible. To prevent more time wastages, I engaged with smaller congregations, one in the urban and one in each rural community. In one of the smaller congregations of about 100 people in the rural community in Amaba, I obtained consent from the priest to organise a meeting with young married men after a Sunday meeting. Three young fathers showed up and after introducing myself, I persuasively marketed my research and asked if they would consider participating. No one signified interest to participate or be further contacted later. While speaking with these men, I had observed some non-verbal dispositions tending towards disinterest. Non-verbal clues such as the frequent phone checks and the lack of affirmation on my prods made me uneasy. I knew I had made a mistake by communicating with the three men together. It would probably have portrayed me as the one in control of the conversion and not the men. I should rather have asked for their phone numbers during the meeting and called each one at their earliest convenience. The latter option would have allowed me to make a good argument and persuade each one to participate on their terms. Determined to find potential participants within this rural community, I approached the priest for assistance. He gave very valuable suggestions about finding men where they work within the community and his clues were very helpful during my recruitment in urban workspaces as well.

Recruiting and Interviewing Men in Urban Work Settings

Recruiting men from where they spent most of their time was indeed a breakthrough idea that changed everything in my recruitment journey. As this was a spontaneous adjustment to my research plan, the choice of the organisation to go to was solely based on my ability to find a gatekeeper who could grant me access at the shortest possible time. Without such assistance, the practicalities of arranging the first meeting could have taken a week or two because of the tall managerial hierarchies that exist in most government-owned organisations. A retired director in the health sector granted me my first opportunity in a public service establishment. With her support, I obtained an appointment to see a ‘big boss’ within a day. Despite this appointment, it was impossible to see the boss, and I was asked to come back on several occasions. After two failed attempts and several hours of waiting, I succeeded. During the period while I waited, I had the chance to develop a good rapport with the male secretary in the director’s office, which also was very valuable for the progress of my work. With his assistance, recruiting participants within the organisation were easier. This work also progressed with the assistance of some interviewees who referred me to other eligible colleagues, following the well-known snowball recruitment technique (Goodman, 2011).

During my interviews in urban work settings, I observed that participants who were recruited by their colleagues were easier to interview because their colleagues already made the first introductions. However, I encountered a few men who were difficult to engage with. For instance, I encountered a man with a typical ‘busy masculine’ persona. First, as I walked into his office, I observed his strict, intimidating look. Despite my warm greeting and my struggle to build a rapport, I felt the occasional ‘go straight to the point’ condescending stare coming from his end. He allowed me to introduce myself, state the purpose of my coming and was willing to participate by signing the consent forms. However, the interview sessions were very formal, with no stories, only short descriptions of his experiences. All my attempts to enable a more engaging conversation using prompts were futile. He ended the interview session within minutes and faced his work immediately afterwards. Some researchers have shared emotional experiences where they had to deal with controversial behaviour including being openly sexualised (Haddow, 2021; Pini, 2005). As Haddow (2021) pointed out, these experiences can become emotionally exhausting with time, affecting our personality and can subsequently become a barrier to good research practices (Van den Scott, 2018). Therefore, researchers should not underestimate these experiences, rather, it is important to reflectively discuss and write about these challenges to help upcoming researchers too (Butera, 2006; Haddow, 2021; Kristensen & Ravn, 2015).

Understanding Time in Research Contexts

While observing the people in the first workspace, I began to understand time intervals between when intensive work occurred and when workers were more relaxed for a chat. For instance, workers arrived at 8 a.m. but commenced work fully when the bosses arrive between 8.45 and 9 a.m. With this knowledge, arriving at 8 a.m. gave me the unique opportunity to develop rapport with the staff and interviewees before serious
work commenced. Spending time with the workers in this way allowed me to immerse myself in the male participant’s environment, observe and know how to navigate discussions based on my perceptions of people’s demeanours when interacting with their colleagues. Understanding off and peak times were also effective in recruiting participants in marketplaces. Finding a suitable time to interview willing participants was a real challenge in the marketplace because of the constant interruptions from passers-by. In the case of my first interviewee in the open market, being the sole owner of his shop, it was impossible to take him away to a quieter place. Re-arranging the interview to the morning of the next day made a huge difference and there were fewer distractions from passers-by.

Furthermore, I initially had a personal struggle with how to inform participants about how long each interview might take. Considering that men tend to act busy all the time, I was very concerned that no man would initially be willing to participate after revealing that the interview might require 30–60 minutes of their time. However, I informed them about the length of time to be sure of their availability especially for participants in urban workspaces. For interviewees with entrepreneurial jobs, there was a greater risk of getting a negative affirmation but it was still worth doing (Deane et al., 2019). As with the interview cases at the marketplace, a good initial rapport was required as well as patience with interviewees as they address other urgent issues with their customers in between. A researcher reported a situation where he contemplated whether to inform participants about the time required for interviews in a similar cultural context, and suggests telling participants upfront about the amount of time required for each interview and accepting the risk of a shorter interview (Harvey, 2011). Following my experiences and the experience of (Deane et al., 2019), taking the risk was worth it as participants do not appear to be as busy as they claim to be.

**Leveraging Motherhood, Gender and Ethnicity**

My position as a student researcher was important in maintaining my access especially after the introduction by ‘the gatekeepers’ who assisted me in the urban public and private organisations. However, in the actual conversations with the educated men, my student researcher status may not have mattered much. The men were more curious about my marital and motherhood status than my education.

Undertaking this research journey as a wife and mother played a significant role in the execution of this research study. Often, the first questions I encountered in all initial exchanges with the men was, ‘Are you married? Do you have children?’ A positive affirmation seemed to provide a certain background for more natural communication. My interviewees implied that my marital status qualified me to have discussions of this sort with them in the first place. Likewise, I perceived a certain form of freedom among some men to discuss with me as a female without that awkward feeling of a married man talking to a single woman alone. Also, experiencing motherhood prepared me to discuss fatherhood with the participants more confidently. As described by Soyer (2014), a young childless woman, in most cases, cannot effectively draw on the experience of motherhood to build discussions devoid of sexual aspects of femininity with male participants (Soyer, 2014). Reflecting on these experiences, I wonder what the outcomes of these interviews would have been if I was unmarried or had not experienced motherhood for this study subject. This is probably debatable in academic contexts, but I think both statuses played an important role in preventing unwanted sexual advances and was instrumental for a successful recruitment phase.

Gender has a significant influence on the recruitment process. It influences what and how issues are expressed based on the sociocultural factors prevailing in the environment. Considering that the cultural beliefs in patriarchal settings might reinforce men’s position of power in their interview interactions with female researchers, some researchers suggest using this to your advantage within the confines of what is acceptable (Haddow, 2021; Mazzei & O’Brien, 2009). Mazzei and O’Brien (2009) describe this concept as ‘role-playing’ in the field which causes the researcher to constantly adjust their identity to the gender constructs in that field to gain considerable access to participants (Mazzei & O’Brien, 2009). This implies that a female researcher can significantly control how she is perceived and received in a research setting and be strategic in utilizing all gender constructed scripts to work in her favour (Mazzei & O’Brien, 2009). For instance, I observed displays of male authority with the male bosses and some older interviewees. I had to adopt a non-threatening disposition physically so as not to be construed as in conflict with the male ego. Even in my daily appearances, I had to ensure that I corresponded to what was outwardly ‘expected’ as a female interviewer: an appropriate dress, homely behaviour and a respectful way of speaking (modest and neutral).

My position as an insider – a native Igbo woman had its advantages in this study. Having been born into this culture, I am familiar with the cultural norms and traditions of the Igbo ethnic group. The Igbo’s value ‘respect’. Addressing people respectfully whether male or female can evoke favour and bring goodwill when one makes a request afterwards. For instance, attaching a title such as ‘Oga’, ‘madam’ or ‘Sir’ (titles signifying seniority) in salutations is an important gesture signifying respect among the Igbo’s. Therefore, I commonly approached a male I desired to recruit with a cordial salutation ending with an ‘oga’ or ‘sir’ title before other conversations started. This art of respectful greeting might have also enhanced my social desirability and good reputation with the men I encountered.

**Recruitment in Rural Settings**

Finding participants for my study in the rural settings was an entirely different experience. I engaged with more men in local health centres than in urban hospital settings. One possible
explanation for this is that the interviewees (first-time fathers) were mostly young farmers, local transporters or entrepreneurs who had their businesses within the community. Being their own bosses created a certain flexibility with their time, unlike their urban counterparts. Also, the health facility was situated close to the community centre where most busy activities occurred; making it easier for the men to come in with their spouses before work.

Two sets of people played a significant role in the success of my recruitment process in rural communities: the health workers and the local motorcycle transport workers. Coming first to each health centre, I was warmly received by the chief nurse, a trained assistant and auxiliary staff. They selflessly served the health needs of everyone in the entire village. They knew the community well and were hugely respected by the community. Amidst their daily very demanding work schedules, they provided valuable assistance in recommending male interviewees for my study.

Beyond the health centre, there was a need to recruit other participants for my study. This was crucial for exploring the perspectives of men who were not prone to coming to the health facility with their spouses. This goal was achieved with the help of the local transporters. Usually, transportation in these small communities is carried out by motorcyclists. These cyclists knew the village inside out and were a major link to potential participants. While on the motorcycle to and from the health centre, I developed a good rapport with them. They took me to homes and stalls in the local market where first-time fathers could be found.

Experiencing the People

Experiencing life with the people of Amaba was an exciting experience for me. Passing through the main gates every morning from Monday to Friday; participating in church services on Sundays and exploring the village on foot in search of local shop owners and local midwives became part of my life for 2 weeks. I volunteered in their health centre, helping in any way I could. Spending time with the people in this way gave me a sense of belonging among the community. This immersion allowed me to familiarise myself through observation and numerous exchanges with the community, to better understand how the community functioned and better understand their problems and lives. This greatly facilitated the interviews afterwards. Davies (2011) had similar experiences in her study recruiting participants by going door to door, but in so doing she saw her research experience as an opportunity to pay attention to the environment inhabited by her participants, to smell, to feel and to experience life in the street, the bus and in the local market (Davies, 2011). Experiencing the people is vital for understanding their culture and in making meaning of the experiences shared between the interviewer and interviewee. RiessmanKohler (1991, 2008) acknowledged the importance of shared cultural norms between the interviewer and interviewee in enhancing understanding of the narratives (Riessman, 2008; RiessmanKohler, 1991). Spending time with local people enhanced this shared understanding of their narratives, deepened my understanding of cultural themes and facilitated the formation of my questions. Conversations flowed better and more automatically in later interviews due to the enriching experience of speaking with the people and the growing understanding of the people and the trust from the people toward me.

Adaptability and Flexibility

In planning a project, researchers often put time and effort to ensure all aspects are covered. However, while in the field, we cannot control participants’ responses or guarantee their willingness to be recruited for our study. I learnt from these experiences the importance of adaptability and flexible readiness as a researcher. Most interview opportunities were unplanned. After the frustration I faced with not finding fathers in urban clinical settings, I learnt to go out daily with my research tools in case of unplanned interview opportunities. Staying persistent and the willingness to adapt to changes within the cultural environment is crucial. Being flexible with my time was pivotal in engaging men in both urban and rural settings. I approached each situation aiming first to build rapport even if it meant spending more time at a location.

Discussion and Conclusion

Most research studies, qualitative and quantitative alike rely on sample recruitment to further their research objectives (Newington & Metcalfe, 2014; Thomas et al., 2007). Particularly with studies where male participants need to be recruited, researchers have argued that men are reluctant to volunteer or show availability to be recruited (Oliffe & Mróz, 2005). Researchers have also highlighted the difficulty in attracting a sufficient number of male participants for their studies (Law, 2019; McCormack et al., 2013; Slauson Blevins & Johnson, 2016). This is not peculiar to qualitative studies alone. In both qualitative and quantitative studies, women have been shown to have a higher response rate than men (Dunn et al., 2004). Harrison suggests from the results of his study (quantitative design) that male participation in reproductive research is low because when allowed to participate men actively exclude themselves (Harrison, 2012). Some researchers believe that their low participation is linked to men’s non-response because of their unavailability or refusal to participate on ‘sensitive’ topics (Slauson Blevins & Johnson, 2016). Another perspective is the researcher’s difficulty in contacting male participants and not because male participants outrightly refuse to participate (Gundgaard et al., 2007). Therefore, since these recruitment challenges seem to be magnified more with qualitative methodologies, researchers need to adopt good strategies that encourage high-quality engagement in the field to ensure sufficient male participant recruitment for their studies.
Fieldwork presents researchers with novel opportunities to test existing methodologies and document their experiences. In this article, I have explained the challenges in our initial methodological plan and other options explored to recruit male interviewees. The absence of men in hospital settings forced us to re-strategise and explore other possibilities beyond hospital walls. This was a unique advantage because exploring other locations resulted in the recruitment of a more extensive range of interviewees who provided broadened views concerning our study objectives.

In the urban context, most interviewees were recruited with the help of gatekeepers and through the effective snowball technique in the public workspaces. Without the assistance of a gatekeeper in similar contexts, one’s efforts as a researcher in gaining access and trust of the people might be delayed or even frustrated. For this research, being married and a mother was a facilitating element and allowed me to engage with interviewees more effectively. Although gender displays were common, I observed that with a good initial rapport, male interviewees showcased fewer dominant demeanours subsequently.

Besides the hospital, the options for recruitment in a pub and church were both unsuccessful. Reflecting on both experiences, I think that the pressure arising from my slow recruitments and from the delays in obtaining consent might have contributed to my demeanour in approaching both recruitment locations. Besides the emotional toll it took, I was running behind schedule. Now, I understand that while meeting deadlines is important, quality work takes time. Therefore, I encourage researchers to approach deadlines more flexibly and approach their daily encounters with a peaceful frame of mind that supports good decision making in the field.

Furthermore, experiencing the people in their environment is a successful strategy to increase engagement. This is crucial in contexts where tradition and culture are strongly marked, especially when researching a sensitive theme. Therefore, I recommend researchers spend time within the wider community, rather than aiming to only interview the research community because this can provide vital insights on how to engage with subsequent interviewees.

Finally, it is vital for researchers to write more reflexively about their experiences in the research field and for more methodological texts to include these experiences while discussing recruitment methods to provide broader insights for researchers.

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Notes

1. FMC hospital caters to the health needs of over 700,000 people living in Umuahia and her environment.
2. In all cases, these lead medical consultants were largely unreachable without a gatekeeper because their busy schedules often involved managing their consulting roles at the public hospital with their thriving private practices.
3. It is important to mention that pregnant women, who registered in the public hospital, also registered in one other private hospital as a backup plan in case government hospitals go on strike at any point in their pregnancy or during delivery.
4. Woman wrapper is a Nigerian term denoting a man whose actions are geared towards pleasing a female or females. In the study’s context, a man who follows his partner to health settings and waits for her is perceived as one under the control of his female partner.

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