

**RONEL FERREIRA**  
University of Pretoria, South Africa

## **CAPITALISING ON THE BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS TO PROMOTE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING IN VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES**

### **Abstract:**

In this paper I illustrate how participatory intervention research can be utilized to promote health and well-being in vulnerable communities. More specifically, I posit that the key to vulnerable communities taking ownership and addressing the challenges they face lies in strong research partnerships, where university researchers and community stakeholders (e.g. teachers and community volunteers) collaborate. As co-researchers, community stakeholders are required to gradually take the lead in participatory intervention projects, and subsequently function in an independent sustainable manner.

My theory is based on two broad research projects, employing similar methodology yet involving different stakeholders as participants. The first project commenced in 2003 (on-going), initially involving teachers as participants. This longitudinal project's (STAR - Supporting Teachers, Assets and Resilience) focus falls on the way in which teachers can promote resilience among vulnerable children or families, by implementing a strength-based philosophy when planning and introducing supportive initiatives in school-communities. Based on the positive outcome of the STAR study (which eventually involved 74 teachers from 12 schools), a follow-up study has been conducted since 2012, involving 38 community volunteers as participants, or rather co-researchers. The follow-up SHEBA (Supporting Home environments in Beating Adversity) project utilizes a similar research design, and focuses on the way in which community volunteers can rely on a strength-based philosophy to support vulnerable clients. Data have been generated and documented over the past more than a decade for the two projects by means of participatory reflection and action based activities and discussions, focus groups, individual interviews, observations, field notes, research diaries and visual techniques. Two primary investigators have taken the lead, involving several academic peers and postgraduate students as co-researchers, working alongside the participating teachers and volunteers. Even though these projects have resulted in rich findings in various related knowledge fields, this presentation specifically concerns the fundamental role of sound research partnerships in promoting sustainable health and well-being among people facing risk and adversity. Research partnerships and collaboration are foregrounded as protective factor within the broader resilience theory framework. In addition to my focus on methodology as basis for the argument, I also link my discussion to strength-based philosophies, as foundation of positive psychology theory. Within the global context of high incidences of vulnerability and increased demands for support on various levels, the possibility of people on ground level taking the lead in providing such support will not only add to existing theory, but also imply practical application value.

### **Keywords:**

Participatory intervention research, Research partnerships, Research collaboration, Vulnerable communities, Resilience, Positive psychology, Strength-based, philosophy

**JEL Classification:** I30, C18