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# Participatory Methods: Working with Disabled Street People in Kolkata

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## Abstract

Despite a long-standing trend towards developing an inclusive society the ‘voices’ of the least able is often missing from current debates. This study is premised on the believe that sensory methods, rather than word or numbers-based methods, can make a major contribution when working alongside people with disabilities.

The central focus of this project is to tell the stories of a small number of vulnerable street people living in Kolkata using images and words. Two emergent themes are evident. The first is the importance of emancipatory research which adheres to the social model of disability described by Barnes:

*Emancipatory research is about the demystification of the structures and processes which create disability, and the establishment of a workable dialogue between the research community and disabled people. (Barnes, 1992).*

To enable this to take place able and disabled researchers must pool their knowledge and skills. Hence, Jon Prosser who is neurotypical provided research and project management skills, and Anna Prosser, who is autistic, has learning difficulties and sensory processing disorder, provided observational skills, passion and empathetic capacity.

The second emergent theme is the need develop strategies to shift the *politics* of *research* from one where the work of professional *researchers* is strongly influenced by funding, disciplines, hierarchy and competition which is mainly useful to corporations, governments, professions and *researchers* themselves, towards a participatory approach that is emancipatory enabling all participants to benefit including ‘subjects’, ‘researchers’ and ‘audience’.

**Keywords:** participatory, visual methods, disability, autistic, learning difficulty

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