

# **Reconnaissance Approach for Identifying/Characterising Informal Providers in Urban Slums**

**By**

**Drs. Prince Agwu & Pamela Ogbozor**

## Who Informal Health Providers (IHPs) are

- **Formally untrained persons providing health services which are usually grounded in traditional and subcultural practices that are mostly unregulated by formal health authorities. They dominate healthcare in settings where formal healthcare may not be optimal or at a high cost.**
- **Because of the mode of practice of IHPs they are bound to be in conflict with regulatory authorities, and so they develop covert systems which could make engaging them through more formal research engagements like interviews difficult.**
- **Studying IHPs needs relationship building and ‘reconnaissance’ offers a pathway.**

## What Reconnaissance is

- Typically used in the military – an approach to first invade the space of an enemy to gain insights into how its environments are organized and the formations of the enemy before an actual attack.
- Lloyd (1965) used the approach to study manufacturers in Australia; Baker and colleagues (2022) used it to explore individual responses during the days of the pandemic; Agwu et al (2023) used it to explore unethical processes in conducting examinations in Nigeria via the Miracle Examination Centres
- Reconnaissance entails the use of unstructured interviews to speak to a handful of community people on subject matters and areas that have never been researched or are under-researched. It aims to create safe and informal spaces for respondents to build relationships with researchers and converse freely on subjects.

## Applied Benefits of Reconnaissance

- Provides a large room for observations of community members and their interactions with IHPs as opposed to scheduled interviews that limit interactions and restrict researchers to an appointed space and time.
- Interviews are unstructured, allowing for a free flow of conversations between researchers, IHPs, and diverse/limitless number of community members. The absence of 'obvious' documents for reading out or entering responses keeps respondents at ease to talk freely.
- Builds relationships that help to guarantee acceptance of more formal interviews and subsequent engagements within the study.
- Provides real-world understanding of issues which helps to develop content of tools for the main study.

## Making Reconnaissance Ethically Compliant

- Full disclosure about the study is made known to gatekeepers of the community and health authorities.
- Those engaged are told about the fundamental aim of the study in the most preferred language obtainable in the context.
- Unstructured guides are part of the application for ethics.
- Anonymity and confidentiality are maintained. So, the identities of those engaged by the researchers are not disclosed even in pictures.



