

Abstract Form

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Project Title:	Decolonizing global health through the medical humanities: lessons learned from arts-based collaborative research on stigma and hope for the future with youth living with HIV in Tanzania

Research Category (please check one):

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Original Research	<input type="checkbox"/>	Clinical Vignette	<input type="checkbox"/>	Quality Improvement	<input type="checkbox"/>	Medical Education Innovation
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Abstract

Background:

There has been significant movement within academic global health to challenge its legacies of colonialism in recent years. Efforts to decolonize global health research have included scale-up of collaborative global health exchanges, increased attention to equitable funding and authorship distribution, and curriculum changes to traditional coursework. Nevertheless, pervasive colonial-era health deficit narratives continue to widely persist in Western academic medicine, which presume that institutions and communities in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) are “incapable of solving their own problems.”¹ Could engagement in the Medical Humanities²—an interdisciplinary field including literature, religion, philosophy, and art—be a pathway toward decolonizing global health?

Methods:

We draw on our previously published arts-based research on stigma and longing among youth living with perinatally-acquired HIV (YPHIV) in Moshi, Tanzania³. Between May and August 2021, responding to a growing local and regional need to better understand and characterize HIV stigma, we conducted collaborative arts-based research with a group of motivated YPHIV. Each month involved alternating semi-structured interviews and “art days;” on these art days, participants came together to create individual artwork on sketchpads in response to prompts posed by co-facilitators.

Findings:

For the six YPHIV (five males; median 22.5 years) participants, artwork not only allowed for deeper exploration of embodied experiences of stigma and trauma but also poignantly captured desires for better futures for themselves and the broader HIV community. Youth participants collectively shared that art days allowed them space to both process past experiences of stigma and reflect on hopes for the future. Art days were a space of mutual learning, friendship, and sharing ideas.

Interpretation:

Our work with youth living with HIV in Tanzania illustrates how arts-based work can: (1) heightened perception of lived experiences of illness; (2) increase attention and affiliation to stories of resilience; (3) foster partnership with participants (and communities) to tell stories meaningfully to them locally and enact change. Our work supports a broader argument that the Medical Humanities may hold promise in further decolonizing global health by countering health deficit narratives, encouraging cultural humility, and building solidarity.

Acknowledgments:

This abstract was presented at the Consortium of Universities for Global Health conference in Los Angeles, CA (March 2024). This work was supported by the Fogarty International Center and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) of the National Institutes of Health (D43 TW009337), an International Research Scientist Development Award funded by the Fogarty International Center and the National Institute of Mental Health (K01 TW-009985), and the Center for AIDS Research (CFAR), Duke University (NIH: P30A1064518).

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