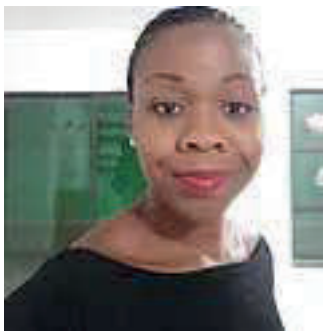


**Verbal Autopsy with Participatory Action Research (VAPAR):
Expanding the knowledge base through partnerships for action on health equity**
VAPAR @ Fifth Global Symposium on Health Systems Research
Liverpool 8 - 12 October 2018



The VAPAR (Verbal Autopsy with Participatory Action Research) research programme (www.vapar.org) contributed to the Fifth Global Symposium on Health Systems Research in Liverpool 8 - 12 October 2018 (<http://healthsystemsresearch.org/hsr2018/>). This is a bi-annual symposium that brings together researchers, policy-makers and other stakeholders to share evidence, discuss methods, and facilitate collaboration and learning in a field that contributes to policy and decision-making through collaboration between researchers and health systems stakeholders. We have put together a summary of our contributions below:



Denny Mabetha, VAPAR Coordinator, who holds a joint appointment between the University of the Witwatersrand and Mpumalanga Department of Health in South Africa, led the submission of visual evidence developed with community stakeholders in the MRC/Wits Agincourt Health and Social

Demographic Surveillance System study area

(<https://www.agincourt.co.za/>) in rural northeast South

Africa. Entitled: ***'Water is life': working with communities to develop local knowledge for action to address water shortage*** and ***It destroys families and communities': alcohol and drug abuse in rural South Africa***, Denny's work highlighted community-defined health priorities using digital storytelling to systematise lived experience into collective forms of knowledge. Denny's work was exhibited both at the Global Symposium and at the Museum of Liverpool.



Dr Oghenebrume Wariri (paediatrician and University of Aberdeen graduate of the MSC Global Health and Management programme 2015/16) now working as a research clinician at MRC Unit The Gambia at LSHTM (<http://www.mrc.gm>) gave an oral presentation on his dissertation

research entitled: ***Rethinking collaboration: developing knowledge partnerships to address under-5 mortality in Mpumalanga province, South Africa***. In this research, we developed a learning platform connecting health systems stakeholders with researchers from the MRC/Wits Agincourt Health and Social Demographic Surveillance System study area (<https://www.agincourt.co.za/>). Our process promoted coproduction and extended the potential of research to inform service organisation and delivery. Wariri also participated in a panel discussion exploring the challenges of novel planning, service delivery and financing strategies to address the health needs of vulnerable groups.

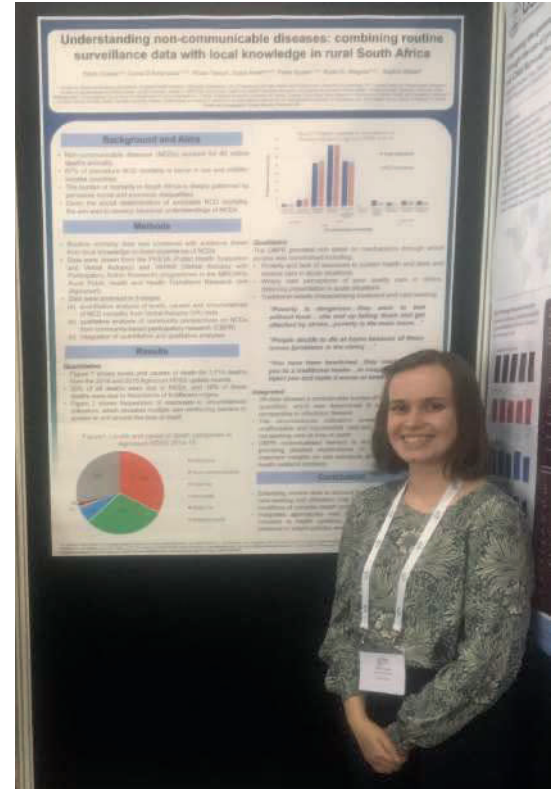




Eilidh Cowan (University of Aberdeen graduate of the MSc Global Health and Management 2016/17) now working as a global health epidemiologist at the University of Cambridge

(<https://tinyurl.com/ycatf68b>) gave a poster presentation on her dissertation research entitled: ***Understanding non-***

communicable diseases: combining routine surveillance data with local knowledge in rural South Africa. Eilidh's analysis demonstrated the high burden of non-communicable diseases in the MRC/Wits Agincourt Health and Social Demographic Surveillance System study area (<https://www.agincourt.co.za/>) and drawing on community-based participatory research helped to contextualise this burden of mortality, providing detailed explanations of why barriers to access exist and providing insights on risk exposure.



Lisa Thomas (University of Aberdeen graduate of the MSc Global Health and Management 2016/17) gave a poster presentation on her placement project, performed with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine entitled: ***Verbal Autopsy In***

Health Policy And Systems: A Literature Review. This research

examined how Verbal Autopsy (a method to understand causes of death where there is no or limited medical certification) can be used in an 'embedded' manner, working directly with health systems and policy processes and stakeholders. Lisa's review illustrated advances in electronic data collection, automated data interpretation and electronic databases that have supported collaboration between researchers, policy makers and planners in data sharing, monitoring and evaluation of disease burdens. Lisa's work, and a related study, have since been published in BMJ Global Health

<https://gh.bmj.com/content/3/2/e000639> and <https://gh.bmj.com/content/3/2/e000640>.



With a related project, **Dr Lucia D'Ambruso**, VAPAR Principal Investigator, lecturer in global health and supervisor of the projects mentioned above, co-facilitated a satellite session entitled: ***Health from whose lens? Learning from international experiences of***

grounding action and services for health and wellbeing inside community cultures, systems and control



(<https://tinyurl.com/yaq52b6n>). In this session we shared evidence and learning from a multi-country consortium Shaping Health (www.shapinghealth.org) on social participation in health systems from high, middle and low income countries, and used participatory approaches to draw also on the experiences of those joining the session. Our experiences showed how social participation and power can make health systems more holistic in approach, more responsive and more inclusive. We discussed and drew recommendations on practices that ground health action and services within community cultures and systems, what challenges they face, and how to facilitate and encourage such practice.



Lucia D'Ambruoso
Liverpool, 12th October 2018