



Empowering local researchers to bridge the women's health research gap in Sierra Leone

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Background

Health research has been recognised as an essential tool in addressing health challenges globally. However, historically, capacity in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) to conduct locally relevant research has been low. Thus, inequalities in health are reflected in inequalities in health research



Results

69 Participants attended initial research skills day

In addition to the 3 study days, additional capacity building workshops took place. This included a writing workshop, presentation skills and how to design a poster.

8 projects were supported with seed-funding

Over 90% of attendees submitted a research proposal, which received individual review and feedback. 8 projects ranging from 1-10 participant per project were awarded. Each project was mentored by a UK based and Sierra leonean supervisor.

Competency scores across all parameters improved after the programme

Competency	Competency score increase (%)
Overall	63.7%
Study planning	56%
Attracting funding	50%
Methodology	50%
Dissemination	60%
Research governance and ethics	54%
Data analysis	40% qual, 36% quant

100% of projects were presented at national or international conferences and have been submitted for publication

Intervention

3 year programme

Research capacity needs assessment

Research skills study days x3

Project proposal development and mentorship

£5000 funding for 8 projects

We ran a Research Capacity-Building Programme, co-led by King's College London (KCL) and the University of Sierra Leone (USL) to improve research capacity



Funded projects

1. Feasibility study to explore the implementation of low-dose aspirin for the prevention of preeclampsia in high-risk women in Karene district
2. Optimising caesarean section rates using Robson criteria in a tertiary maternity hospital in Sierra Leone
3. Identifying the dietary practices and contributing factors that may lead to nutritional risk
4. PremPrep 6 audit: interventions to improve preterm birth outcomes
5. Access to health care for disabled pregnant girls/adolescents across 2 Young Lives intervention sites in Sierra Leone
6. Exploration and assessment of the provisions of respectful maternity care in two hospitals providing maternal health services in Freetown, Sierra Leone
7. Optimising blood availability for pregnant women
8. The perception of women of child bearing age and clinicians on taking low dose Aspirin for the prevention of Preeclampsia



"We now have the capacity to conduct our own research."

"With this seed funding project, it shaped me to know what research design is"

Some suggested improvements, included having a clearer timeline for each project, a more streamlined funding process, and guidance on problem-solving when supervisors were unavailable.



Conclusion

Through education, mentorship and investment, the 'Designing Clinical Research Programme' is one mechanism to build local research capacity. The work of the CRIBS NIHR Global Research Group could be extrapolated and applied globally to address inequalities in health and health research in a multitude of specialties across various regions thereby strengthening research capacity worldwide.