

Building a sustainable global health community for women: a narrative inquiry of implementing a mentorship program

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Background:

Global health is an expanding field, with many opportunities for people to collaborate on emerging challenges. However, the recent pandemic has highlighted the double burden of social- and employment-work placed on women, which make it harder for women to access and contribute to global health work. We describe how a formal mentorship program between two women in global health creates a sustainable platform for critical learning, professional development, and future partnerships.

Methods:

We participated in a formal mentorship program (Canadian Association for Global Health Mentornet), which ran virtually from April to November 2021. This is a competitive program and pairs were matched based on our common research interests and goals. We selected relevant global health modules to guide monthly one-on-one meetings. We conducted a narrative inquiry by recording our experiences in the mentorship program as mentee and mentor, and explored how our positionality as women working in global health has influenced our research endeavours.

Findings:

We were paired in the program as a PhD student in epidemiology and an assistant professor in a school of nursing, with a shared interest in global maternal-child health. Throughout the program we have built a strong relationship based on common research interests, extending to individual mental health and well-being. During regular monthly meetings we discussed research experiences, personal experiences, and professional development. These discussions lead to deeper reflections about our roles as women working in global health. Due to the strong relationship that we built, we will continue to meet regularly after the completion of the program and seek opportunities for future collaboration.

Interpretation:

This mentorship program has the potential to create sustainable partnerships and community among women working in global health for both professional and personal development. This mentoring relationship provided two women with a safe space for discussion, support and exploration of opportunities to expand their contributions to global health research. With more awareness, through published benefits of formal mentorship programs, the value of programs like this may be realized and may support increased funding to build capacity of programs for women working in global health.

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