Red Zone Paramedics– a film about the everyday experiences of an ambulance crew in Cape Town: Using film to develop bottom-up solutions to address violence.

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PLEASE NOTE: This is a multimedia submission (short documentary film: https://vimeo.com/285241755)

Background:

Health systems are deeply rooted in historical and socio-political contexts. In 1994, the South African government inherited a deeply inequitable health system and apartheid policies created large disparities between racial groups in terms of socio-economic status, occupation, education, housing and health. These patterns of inequality are still present today, and exceptionally high levels of violence persist in geographic areas that mirror apartheid spatial patterns. Although outcomes for key issues (such as maternal and child health) are improving in South Africa as a whole, violence remains endemic and in the Western Cape specifically, the rates of violence are on the increase. This poses a significant challenge for delivering PHC for all, and emergency medical services in this context have specific challenges. With an increasing number of attacks on ambulance crews since 2012, the safety of paramedics has become a national priority.

Methodological approach (action research in HPSR):

Violence is connected to Sustainable Development Goals 3 (Good Health) and 10 (Reduced Inequality) and given its complex nature, requires new research methods to support the community-based interventions required to address it. In the WCDOH, film is part of th process. Historically, addressing violence was seen as the responsibility of the criminal justice system. However, the Western Cape Department of Health (WCDOH) is currently implementing a range of evidence-based inter-sectoral interventions that take a public health approach to violence, and seek to address the complex social factors (at the level of society, community, family and individual) that interact to produce violence.

‘Red Zone Paramedics’ is a film about an ambulance crew working the night shift on New Years Eve in Mitchells Plain, a particularly violent part of Cape Town. The film follows the crew as they respond to emergencies. With long granular shots winding through darks streets while navigating the visceral complexities of delivering healthcare – this is a film about the everyday experiences of life on the road.

Sub-theme significance: Community-led and participatory governance initiatives are a key part of this strategy. Paramedics are the community health workers (CHWs) of emergency care. They deliver healthcare to people in their homes, at the time when they need it most. Improving neighborhood safety requires new models of community engagement to develop shared governance and bottom-up accountability frameworks, to achieve the goal of delivering emergency health care for all.

Purpose/Objective: WCDOH uses the film to facilitate public conversations with community-based inter-sectoral groups about issues of violence, and to co-produce appropriate strategies.

(NOTE: The film is 16 minutes long)