Community Capacity Dimensions
Influencing Success of Local Initiatives:
The Importance of Reflexivity

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Presenter Disclosures

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What is it about some communities that makes them successful in addressing local issues, while others struggle with the same issues for years?
Community Capacity

• “...the characteristics of communities that affect their ability to identify, mobilize, and address social and public health problems” (Goodman et al., 1998, p. 259)

• “…the interaction of human capital, organization resources, and social capital existing within a given community that can be leveraged to solve collective problems and improve or maintain the well-being of that community” (Chaskin et al., 2001, p. 7)

• “…a set of dynamic community traits, resources, and associational patterns that can be brought to bear for community building and community health improvement” (Wendel et al., 2009, p. 285)

  - Emergent property—exists at the community level
  - Important in addressing issues, but unclear exactly HOW it works

Dimensions of Capacity

- Skills, knowledge, and resources
- Social relationships and networks
- Mechanisms for community dialogue & collective action
- Quality of leadership and leadership development
- Civic participation
- Community history & values
- Reflexivity and culture of learning

Project Context: PACE

- Core research project of Center for Community Health Development, a Prevention Research Center

- Four rural communities

- Regional partnership comprised of volunteers from all four communities; technical assistance from CCHD

- History of CBPR projects together
Project Background: PACE

- Key issue: Obesity
- Locally identified priority: Access to opportunities for recreational physical activity
- Community health development approach with two key outcomes:
  - Increased access to PA
  - Increased community capacity

Community Health Development

- Assessment
- Evaluation
- Prioritization
- Implementation
- Planning

Multiple Case Study Design

- Mixed-method multiple comparative case study design (Yin, 2008) focused on community capacity related to addressing a specific health topic (obesity)
- Evidence
  - Process documentation
  - Archival documents
  - Direct observations
  - Participant observations
- Independent coding of evidence
  - High inter-rater reliability
  - Discrepancies among coders discussed and resolved
Four Communities, Four Solutions

• Leon County
  • Focus: Families with children
  • Limitations: Geography, cost, facilities
  • Solution: Promote geocaching through intercity competition

• Burleson County
  • Focus: Whole community
  • Limitations: Competing agendas, interests, limited leadership capacity
  • Solution: Count something they had already completed

• Madison County
  • Focus: Low-income families
  • Limitations: Geography, cost, facilities
  • Solution: Partner with community center to complete walking trail with exercise stations

• Grimes County
  • Focus: Older adults
  • Limitations: Transportation, cost, sustainability
  • Solution: Offer exercise classes to older adults in senior centers

Defining Success

• At the community level, success was defined as having met the objective of their local project
  • Activities implemented and sustainable
  • Potential for expansion or replication
  • Satisfaction of the partners involved with the process
Method

- Comparative Qualitative Analysis
  - Evidence related to each dimension of community capacity
  - Documentation of each community’s process; movement between elements of the process not linear
  - Outcome of each community’s process
- Post hoc analysis: how communities dealt with failure when it happened
- Examination of necessary and sufficient factors in community success

Findings: Factors Influencing Success

- Positive effect
  - Civic participation
  - Knowledge, skills, and resources
  - Quality of leadership and leadership development
- Necessary but not sufficient
  - Community history and values
  - Mechanisms and structures for community dialogue
  - Social relationships and networks
  - Determining factor
    - Reflexivity

The Role of Reflexivity

- Communities as units of identity, practice, and solution
- Community level of analysis
- How do communities learn?
- What's the difference between communities that fail and communities that succeed after having failed?
- Culture of learning is important – can this be cultivated?
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