Defining Community Through Culture and Experience

Presentation prepared for
Social Epidemiology Health Disparities Symposium
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Partners

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  Marianne Sullivan, MPH
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  Seattle Indian Health Board
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  Refugee Women’s Alliance
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Today’s talk

• Review of two domestic violence (DV) projects defining community
• Ways we used CBPR to craft the project
• Steps taken to define community
• Benefits and challenges of a fluid definition of community
Lessons from the Community Interview Project

• “A group of people with existing relationships who share a common interest.”

Common interests may include:

• Living in the same geographic area
• Similar ethnic or cultural background
• Relating and interacting socially with one another

DV in Nine Ethnic Communities

Description of the project

• Qualitative descriptive CBPR using focus groups and individual interviews

• Understand cultural context of DV, access to, and satisfaction with, DV services among ethnic and LGBT survivors of DV

• Use findings to contribute to a coordinated culturally relevant response to women who are experiencing DV and improve Seattle’s DV system

• Cultural communities: African American, Amharic-speaking, Cambodian, Filipina, Latina, LGBT, American Indian/Alaskan Native (AI/AN), Russian-speaking, Vietnamese

• Funded by National Institutes of Justice
Origin of the project

• Idea came from Seattle DV Council
• Initial plan was to gather prevalence data via telephone survey
• Stakeholders demanded addressing issues for marginalized communities first
• Decided to conduct focus groups to better understand DV experience
Research project structure

• Project Advisory Group (PAG)
  – Advised on group selection
  – Helped with ideas for recruitment and ensuring safety

• Qualitative Research Team (QRT)
  – Bilingual/bicultural representatives from each ethnic group and researchers
  – Met at least monthly to plan and conduct research, analyze data and write findings
Process of deciding on communities

- Initial grant proposal to NIJ: African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Latinas, AI/AN
- Additional funding through the city for more groups
- Stakeholder meeting of Seattle DVC to decide on additional groups
- Consideration of ethnicity, disability, marginalized groups (incarcerated women)
- Balance of stakeholder interests, population numbers, research constraints
- Final decisions by CBPR colleagues on project
Social Support Groups for DV Survivors

Description of the project

- Idea developed from previous NIJ-funded project on DV and access to services
- Pilot project to test feasibility of intervention in refugee and immigrant communities
- Social support and skill-building groups
- Cultural communities: Cambodian, Ethiopian, Russian-speaking and Somali
- Funded by CDC through Seattle’s Urban Research Center grant
Social Support Groups for DV Survivors

Origin of the project

• Follow-up to NIJ funded project-met with partners to assess interest in continuing

• Solicited funding through Seattle Partners/CDC

• Partnered with ReWA

• Oversight by Seattle Partners board
Social Support Groups for DV Survivors

Research project structure

• PHSKC evaluation team  
  (epidemiologists, anthropologists)

• ReWA intervention team  
  (DV program manager and advocates)
Social Support Groups for DV Survivors

Process of deciding on communities

• Initial conversations between researchers and ReWA staff of which communities to follow up with

• Based on earlier research--wanted to include some of those groups

• Value in adding new cultural groups

• Balance of larger and smaller population groups

• Consideration of ReWA staff availability and expertise for particular groups
Benefits of a fluid definition of community

• In keeping with CBPR process that involves negotiation and re-negotiation at all levels of any given project

• Allows for a deepening, ongoing understanding of what constitutes community

• Communities themselves are not static
Challenges of a fluid definition of community

• Funders seldom allow the necessary time
• Additional challenges for a researcher of color working in her/his own community
• Strict research design does not always accommodate fluidity
For more information:

**Cultural Issues Affecting Domestic Violence Service Utilization in Ethnic and Hard to Reach Populations**

**We can help each other: Social Support groups for domestic violence survivors**
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**Seattle Partners for Healthy Communities**
http://depts.washington.edu/hprc/SeattlePartners/