Community-Engaged Participatory Action Research as an Integral Part of MSW Research Curricula

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Our plan for today...

Overview of CEPAR

The Course

The Projects

Outcomes

Lessons Learned
Community-Engaged Participatory Action Research

Research Methods for Social Work
Engaging Community Partners

What happens next? Exploring child protection outcomes in a cohort of opioid-exposed infants

Leah Agren, Meagan Foss, Jennifer Koch, & Alison Mitchell
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Faculty Advisor: Jennifer Middleton, LCSW, PhD
Assistant Professor, University of Maine School of Social Work
Since 2001, Maine has had the highest rate of opioid abuse in the country, resulting in a rise of opioid-exposed infants.

Statewide, Maine is experiencing dramatically increasing rates of substance-exposed births, from 165 drug affected babies reported in 2005 to 927 reported in 2013 – an increase of about 18%.

EMMC recorded 173 opioid-exposed infants born in 2011, representing a little over 10% of births that year, and a 27% increase within two years.
Methodology

Exploratory and descriptive study
Secondary analysis of existing case data

Convenience sample: 173 opioid-exposed infants born at EMMC in 2011

UMaine IRB approval & EMMC IRB approval

Identified sample containing 173 infant names and dates of birth transferred from EMMC to OCFS
OCFS data query to identify any matching records; identified sample including matched data transferred back to EMMC, de-identified by EMMC partner, transferred to students

Students analyzed de-identified infant data, describing:
- child protection outcomes
- characteristics of household composition and family composition

Indicators of Trauma-Informed Practice: Measuring the Impact of the Sanctuary Model among Youth Residential and School Programs in a Mid-Atlantic State

Sarah Harvey, Reva Kominsky, & Dan Torinus
MSW Students, University of Maine School of Social Work

Faculty Advisor: Jennifer Middleton, LCSW, PhD
Assistant Professor, University of Maine School of Social Work
Community Partnership

A community of inquiry

The Collaborative: 15 agencies contributed data, one agency head helped to facilitate the project.

ANDRUS: Served as a liaison with the Collaborative.

School of Social Work: Professor coordinated partnership and enlisted MSW student researchers.

The Four Pillars of the Sanctuary Model

- Trauma Theory
- Sanctuary Commitments
- S.E.L.F.
- Sanctuary Toolkit
In social services, there is an increasing focus on substantiation of program effectiveness through the use of evidence-based practices and outcomes measurement.

“Outcome studies... vary widely in scope and suffer from an absence of control or comparison groups, poorly defined service units, sampling problems, and improper selection or measurement of outcome criteria, and most importantly, improper aggregation of results.”
- Butler, Little, & Grimard (2009)
Methodology

Mixed-methods design:
• Quantitative Data Collection
• Qualitative Data Analysis

Nonprobability convenience sample of social service agencies using the Sanctuary Model
(N=15, Response Rate 55%)

A 2-page, self-administered survey yielded the indicators and metrics used by each agency

Data manually analyzed via Excel pivot table

An iterative process with the Collaborative informed the data analysis processes

7 Principles of Community-Engaged Participatory Action Research

- Recognizes community as a unit of identity
- Builds on strengths and resources in the community
- Facilitates collaborative, equitable involvement of all partners in all phases of the research
- Integrates knowledge and intervention for mutual benefit of all partners
- Promotes a co-learning and empowering process that attends to social inequalities
- Involves a cyclical and iterative process
- Disseminates findings and knowledge gained to all partners
### Challenges

**Alison:**  
- Capacity-building among partners  
- Systems development  
- Long-term process

**Sarah:**  
- Geographic distance  
- Reluctance to complete survey due to skills gap and other agency constraints

### Benefits

**Alison:**  
- Local relevance of the issue being investigated  
- Building on existing strengths and resources  
- Facilitating a collaborative partnership  
- Disseminating results to partners and broader community

**Sarah:**  
- Co-learning  
- Strong relationships and support from partnering agencies and ANDRUS  
- Motivation and engagement were enhanced  
- Iterative process provided greater insight on our data
Benefits for Community Partners

- Additional resources – technical and manpower
- Aligned with Sanctuary Model principles
- Critical contribution to research/evaluation efforts

Benefits for Junior Faculty

- Co-learning
- Relationships with partner agencies
- Stay sharp in research skills
- Potential co-authored publications & presentations
Lessons Learned

Community Partners

• Relationships are important
• Maintain emphasis on meaningful & useful projects
• Get input from partners on the project deliverables

Students

• Prepare students for the project selection process
• Smaller is better
• Limit IRB exposure
• Teaching assistant can help bridge learning

Conclusion

Questions?

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