Taking Culture Seriously in Community Mental Health

Doing Community Based Research with Immigrant Populations


5th Annual Diversity and Wellbeing Conference

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Centre for Community Based Research

- 25 years of social innovation in Canada
- 250 community based research projects
- Balancing academic excellence with community relevance
- Independent, non-profit and entrepreneurial

“The power of knowledge to impact change” - Since 1982

www.communitybasedresearch.ca/takingcultureseriouslyCURA
Purpose

• To share information about collaborative research initiative in Ontario

• To share mechanisms to structure collaborative research involving academics, practitioners, family members and culturally diverse communities

• To discuss strategies of sharing knowledge and mobilizing various audiences for future change
Cultural diversity brings new realities and new opportunities for the mental health system and for ethno-racial communities.
An Innovative and Collaborative Research Initiative

Ontario 2005-2010
Taking Culture Seriously In Community Mental Health

• 5-year research initiative bringing together university and community partners in Toronto and Waterloo Region

• To explore, develop, pilot and evaluate mental health services and supports that are culturally effective for the multicultural Canada

• Funded by Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF)

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Three Phases

Phase I: Exploring Conceptualizations of Mental Health Problems and Practice (2005-2007)

Phase II: Developing Culturally Effective Practice (2007-2008)

Phase III: Researching Demonstration Projects (2008-2010)
CURA Partners

Partnership growing from 17 to 45 individuals and groups:

- 5 cultural linguistic communities: India (Sikh Punjabi), Somalia (Somali), Latin America (Spanish), China (Mandarin-speaking), Poland (Polish)

- Practitioners/service providers from mental health organizations and settlement service organizations

- Multidisciplinary academics from six universities/research centres
How We Structure Ourselves

CURA PARTNERSHIP GROUP

- Research Sub-committees
- Training Working Group
- Knowledge Mobilization Working Group
- Evaluation Working Group

Research Team
Project researchers, student researchers, community researchers

Toronto
Steering Committee
-service providers, academics, cultural-linguistic community representatives

Toronto Somali community
Toronto Sikh Punjabi community
Toronto Mandarin community

Toronto Polish community
Waterloo Somali community

Waterloo
Steering Committee
-service providers, academics, cultural-linguistic community representatives

Waterloo Polish community
Waterloo Latin American community
Waterloo Mandarin community

Toronto Latin American community
Waterloo Sikh Punjabi community
Ongoing Engagement
Practitioners and Researchers

- Meaningful participation in Partnership Group, methods subcommittees and working groups
  - Collaborative data analysis and theory building
  - Collaborative writing, presentations
  - Developing demonstration projects
  - Reflection and evaluation research

- Authorship and communication guidelines

- Engagement of partners is ongoing and full of negotiations

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Ongoing Engagement
Diverse Communities

- Importance of research entry
- Engagement is ongoing
- Importance of sharing resources, being authentic
- Community visits and community forums

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Mechanisms of Engagement

1. Engaging “gatekeepers” in proposal development
2. Site visits
3. Steering committees
4. Community researchers
5. Ongoing communication
6. Demonstration projects
But it’s not mechanical...
Commitment to Participatory Action Research (PAR)

“PAR is a research approach that involves active participation of stakeholders, those whose lives are affected by the issue being studied, in all phases of research for the purpose of producing useful results to make positive changes” (Nelson, Ochocka, Griffin & Lord, 1998, p.12)

- “Research with,” not “research on” people
- Training and mentoring
- Opportunity of meaningful involvement
- Valuing experiential knowledge
- Data for advocacy
Commitment to PAR

• Facilitating shared ownership of processes and products is crucial
  – It creates synergy to tackle difficult social and community issues

• Values of PAR
  – Empowerment
  – Diversity
  – Practice
  – Social justice
  – Education and learning
Balancing Excellence with Relevance

• Beginning with practical relevance to the community
• Research questions emerging from lived experience
• Implications of research findings being co-determined
• Maintaining standards of academic excellence in design and rigour
Community Researchers/ Facilitators

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Intended Outcomes

This CURA hopes to provide real opportunities for:

- mental health practice to be shaped in terms of cultural diversity
- related policy to be developed
- existing theory to be expanded
- diverse meanings of mental health and mental illness to be better understood
- by implementing a model of collaboration among communities, academic institutions, practitioners, service providers and policymakers

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Knowledge Production

Emerging Framework

Values
- Individual and community self determination
- Dynamic inclusion
- Relational synergy

Reciprocal collaboration
- Mental health policy-makers/planners
- Mental health organizations/practitioners
- Cultural-linguistic communities

Outcomes
- Improved acceptability and accessibility of services
- Better mental health promotion and illness prevention
- Increased evidence that culture is taken seriously

Actions
- Enhancing communities
- Reconstructing the mental health system
- Building reciprocal relationships

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Knowledge Production...

• Importance of **reciprocal relationship building** between mental health system and diverse communities
  – community outreach and engagement in the process of transforming mental health system

• Importance of **prevention**
  – stigma-busting health promotion
  – early interventions
  – population specific interventions
Knowledge Sharing....
Community Mobilization...
Stimulating innovation
Community Impact:
Innovation Based on Research

12 demonstration projects proposed
• Three currently underway
  – Youth in schools theatre initiative (Waterloo)
  – Strengthening Mental Health in Communities (Waterloo Region)
  – Punjabi Community Health Services (Brampton, Greater Toronto Area)
Evaluating Impact

• Innovative evaluation framework

• Ongoing evaluation, to measure impact on cultural awareness and power awareness among mental health providers/policy makers

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Questions and Answers
Discussion

• What are the main messages to take home for you?

• What strategies of sharing knowledge and mobilizing various audiences for future change have you applied?

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CURA Contact

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