

Sharing What We're Doing

CURA partners are now in the second year of a five-year study designed to explore, develop, implement and evaluate ways of providing community-based mental health services and supports effectively for people from culturally diverse backgrounds.

This issue of CURA News provides a snapshot of the many ways in which the CURA team is expanding (10 community facilitators/co-researchers), research is progressing (key informant interviews, focus groups, case studies), and our growing knowledge base is being shared.

1. Introducing the CURA community researchers

In January, 10 community facilitators/co-researchers were hired, one from each of the five cultural-linguistic communities collaborating on CURA in Toronto and Waterloo Region. Over the next two years, they will have a dual role: to co-facilitate focus groups, interviews and community forums within their communities; and to mobilize their communities around the issue of mental health.



CURA community researchers. On left side (back row): Istar Ahmed, Anne Wisniewski, Karolina Korsak; (front) Angela Gao. Right side (back) Helen Song, Jatinder Saggu, Harjit Singh Bains; (front) Ana Luz Martinez, Halima Abdilkadir. Absent: Irene Altimira

Over the past few months, this team of community researchers has been meeting twice a month, becoming familiar with the CURA study, doing in-depth training on focus group recruitment and facilitation, and translating the focus group materials into their own languages.

As a group, they have formed a strong bond, providing each other with ideas and encouragement as they face the challenge of discussing the often taboo subject of mental health within their communities.

The hard work at team meetings is interspersed with laughter and good conversation as we get to know each other better. Although we speak different languages, we share a common purpose: to find ways to break the silence around mental health and mental illness, and to make it easier for people from diverse cultural backgrounds to get the kind of support they need when facing these issues.

2. Update on research activities

This is a busy year for the CURA study, with all of the research methods to be completed in preparation for the first CURA conference on December 7, 2006.

Key informant interviews

The purpose of the key informant interviews was to explore issues and practices related to mental health and cultural diversity in Canada and to suggest future action.

Between January and March 2006, CURA researchers interviewed 22 people in four main categories: policymakers/researchers; consumer/survivors and families; umbrella organizations (multicultural and mental health); multicultural leaders.

The interviews resulted in a constructive critique of the current system and a range of practical suggestions. The key informant sub-committee is currently completing analysis of the transcripts.

Focus groups

The first main task for the community facilitators/co-researchers has been to organize and facilitate focus groups in their communities. A total of 20 focus groups were held in May and June, two in each of the five cultural-linguistic communities in Toronto and Waterloo. Participants came from a wide range of backgrounds, ages, and experiences, to share their thoughts on the meaning of mental health/mental health problems, where they find support, and how the Canadian mental health system could provide more effective support.

Since the focus groups were conducted in the language of the participants, community facilitators/co-researchers are in the process of transcribing the focus group discussions and translating the transcripts into English. Data analysis will take place over the summer.

Service provider survey

In June, an invitation was sent to community mental health service provider organizations to participate in an online survey. The survey explores current practices in service provision to diverse cultural-linguistic communities, as well as successes and challenges.

Individual interviews/case studies

Towards the end of the summer, the community facilitators/co-researchers will be conducting interviews with individuals in their community who have struggled with mental health issues. With the permission of these individuals, they will also interview two people in their support network (e.g., family member, spiritual leader, support worker, neighbour). There will be 10 clusters of three interviews (30 interviews in total). Each cluster of interviews will be the basis for one case study, providing in-depth insights into the issue of mental health from diverse cultural perspectives.

3. Theory building

As the data are analyzed from the various research methods, there is a CURA sub-committee hard at work developing a framework of "cultural empowerment" that incorporates the research findings. This concept of cultural empowerment was proposed by CURA partners in the proposal development stage of the study as a way of moving beyond existing power- and culture-oriented models to provide practitioners with ways of effectively responding to the needs of multicultural Canada.

The draft cultural empowerment framework will be introduced at the CURA conference in December where conference participants will have an opportunity to develop it further. The resulting framework will be used as a basis for pilot projects to be developed in the third year of the study.

4. Knowledge sharing

A key component of the CURA study is knowledge mobilization. In addition to the website (www.crehscura.com) and the bi-annual issues of CURA News and CURA Findings, CURA partners have begun sharing information about CURA at conferences.

**CURA Conference
December 7, 2006
Wilfrid Laurier University,
Waterloo, ON
Plan to attend!**

5. CURA Conference

Our first CURA conference will be held in December at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario. This is the first of two conferences, with the second one - an international conference - planned for the end of the CURA study in 2009.

The 2006 conference will be open to all those who have been involved with CURA to date: partner and community organizations, participants in the research methods, policymakers and funders. It will be a one-day event, with brief presentations from the various research sub-committees in the morning, and working groups in the afternoon focusing on refining the cultural empowerment framework.

Since the framework will be the basis for developing pilot projects to be implemented and evaluated in the latter years of the study, it will be important to add your voice to the process.

So make note of the date - December 7, 2006 - and plan to attend!

For updates on the project, visit the website at www.crehscura.com. On the Your Voice page of the website, there is a forum where you can respond to the main research questions as well. To link directly to the forum page, go to www.crehscura.com/forum/

Conference Presentations 2005-06

Multicultural Days Conference, St. Catharines, Ont., June 2005

Creative Directions: Ontario Peer Development Initiative Conference, Toronto, Ont., October 2005

Second International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, University of Illinois, U.S.A., May 2006

3rd Quebec-Ontario Conference in Community Psychology, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ont., May 2006

Canadian Council for Refugees international conference, York University, June 2006

Making Gains Conference 2006, Toronto, Ont., November 2006

Next Steps

Summer 2006

- Survey analysis
- Analysis of focus group data
- Individual interviews/case studies data gathering continues
- Literature review continues

Fall 2006

- Analysis of individual interviews/case studies
- Development of cultural empowerment framework
- Preparation for CURA Conference