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Community Based Participatory Research Is Useful When Done Properly

What is this research about?

Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) is a new way of doing health research. CBPR turns the community being researched into co-researchers who provide input, feedback, and can reflect on the value of the research findings. The research benefits from the participants' knowledge of their own community. The Positive Youth Project is a great example of CBPR that sought to improve the living conditions of young people with HIV. Using the Positive Youth Project as a case study is a useful way of reflecting on the advantages and challenges of CBPR as compared to other research methods.

What did the researchers do?

Dr. Sarah Flicker used the Positive Youth project as a case study of the benefits and costs to the participants and stakeholders in the research. Dr. Flicker studied research data from two sources:

1. Facilitator-Participant Observation and Field Notes: as the project co-coordinator, Dr. Flicker took detailed field notes for all group activities, and kept records of attendance of all participants and all research accomplishments.
2. In-Depth Semistructured Interviews: 2 academics, 2 service providers, and 10 youth were interviewed on their experiences for about an hour each.

What you need to know:

The Community Based Participatory Research method is an excellent approach to doing health research as it can potentially benefit the participants, researchers, and community service providers. The significant costs, in terms of time, money, and commitment, need to be considered when wanting to get the most out of the CBPR method.

What did the researchers find?

The major benefits of CBPR in the Positive Youth Project were grouped into two categories: the research itself, and the stakeholders. Benefits to the research itself were broken down into the following points.

- Better Questions: Youth helped with making the questions that met their needs. Youth were able to add questions about a variety of social services they receive.
- Better Recruitment: Researchers could get more youth to take part in the research because the recruitment materials were designed by youth themselves.
- Better Data Collection: The input of youth participants helped create other interview formats. Youth who weren't comfortable being tape recorded could have a note taker or write out their answers.

- Better Analysis: Youth researchers offered new ways of understanding the collected data.
- Better Dissemination: Every group involved in the project could spread the research findings to their own peer audiences.
- Better Action: Community based research organizations involved in the research could immediately incorporate the research findings into their work.

The stakeholders who were found to benefit from this research were broken down into:

- HIV positive youth
- Academics
- Community service providers

Many youth who took part also received additional benefits from the project. Interacting with the service providers involved in the research helped many find housing and programs like addiction counseling. The benefits of this research to the research and to stakeholders came with significant costs. As one service provider who took part in the project said:

“ I think research seems to be more complicated, takes longer, is more in-depth and needs more money than anything else I’ve been involved with...”

The slow pace of the project and the time commitments from weekly meetings took their toll on all participants of the research.

How can you use this research?

Policymakers, community, groups and service providers will find this research useful if they plan to apply the CBPR model. It is important for groups that want to take advantage of the benefits associated with enhanced community participation, to be aware of the added costs of this type of research. This paper

will help anyone considering CBPR plan their budgets and timelines in a way that maximizes the benefits to research and participants.

About the Researcher

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Citation

Flicker, S. (2008). Who benefits from community-based participatory research? A case study of the Positive Youth Project. *Health Education & Behavior*, 35(1), 70-86. Available online at <http://bit.ly/1cYx7xZ>

Keywords

Community research, Youth, HIV/AIDS, Community Health services, Social support systems

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York’s Knowledge Mobilization Unit provides services for faculty, graduate students, community and government seeking to maximize the impact of academic research and expertise on public policy, social programming, and professional practice. This summary has been supported by the Office of the Vice-President Research and Innovation at York and project funding from SSHRC and CIHR.

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