



Latino youth participation in community-based participatory research to reduce teen pregnancy disparities



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ABSTRACT

Background: Community-based participatory research can provide a framework to build community capacity to do health equity research, particularly from community members who may not typically participate in research design and intervention.

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to describe a community-based coalition's partnership and engagement with Latino youth throughout the research process addressing health disparities in unintended teen pregnancy rates in a local community. Israel and colleagues' components of CBPR provide a framework to develop youth participation throughout the research process.

Method: High school and college Latino youth participated in health equity research from community assessments to design an intervention and dissemination of results.

Results: Working with youth can improve the integrity and validity of the research process and can also provide benefits to the community and individual youth members, resulting in increased community capacity for health equity research.

Discussion: Lessons learned about the direct and indirect benefits and challenges are presented. Community-based partnerships working with youth should consider documenting the individual and collective impact of community engagement on the youth from the onset of participation.

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1. Introduction

Despite decreasing teen pregnancy rates, disparities in Latina teen pregnancy rates continue nationally, within the state of Oregon, and locally within Jackson County, Oregon (National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2013b; Oregon Department of Human Services, 2011; Oregon Health Authority, 2011; Ventura, Curtin, Abma, & Henshaw, 2012). Using a community based participatory research (CBPR) approach, a community and academic partnership was formed in response to a call for action from Latino community leaders. This call to action was based on concerns about the rise in local Latina teen pregnancy rates in Jackson County, which are double non-Hispanic rates (Oregon Health

Authority, 2011). During the initial formation of the partnership, which was to become the Jackson County Latina Health Coalition, a high school student joined the partnership because her senior project was based on Latina teen pregnancy. Based on this experience within the first year of formation, youth members were added to the coalition. The purpose of this article is to describe a partnership with Latino youth throughout the research process, from community assessments to design of an intervention and dissemination of results. Lessons learned will be presented focusing on the direct and indirect benefits and challenges of working collaboratively with youth. Israel, Eng, Schulz, and Parker's (2013) components of CBPR provide a framework to highlight youth participation throughout the research process. These components are 1) partnership formation and maintenance; 2) community assessment and diagnosis; 3) definition of the issue and design and conduct of research; 4) feedback interpretation, dissemination, and application/translation of results.

Working with adolescents in the research process can enhance the integrity and validity of the research process and can also provide

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benefits to the community and individual youth members. One particular benefit, since our project was focused on an adolescent health issue, was that youth input provided context and relevance related to the coalition's research process (Jacquez, Vaughn, & Wagner, 2013). One of the goals of our coalition was to build community capacity in research methodology that members would bring to future community collaborations. Individual empowerment that results from participating in the research process can occur for youth, which is especially important for Latino youth who have been reported to be less civically engaged than others (Lopez et al., 2006). Factors that can be barriers to community engagement include educational level, poverty, lack of role models, and immigration status (Lopez et al., 2006; Pritzker, LaChapelle, & Tatum, 2012).

2. Partnership formation and maintenance

Partnership formation and maintenance is the first component of CBPR research, incorporating an initial phase of forming a partnership and an ongoing phase of maintaining, sustaining, and evaluating partnerships (Israel et al., 2013). During partnership formation, the coalition initiated strategies to engage youth input into the research partnership. Based on a strategy recommended by CBPR consultant, Nancy Findholt, PhD, RN, (personal communication, December 2, 2010), youth participated in a logo contest for our coalition to be used on t-shirts and in coalition documents and presentations. Contest instructions were disseminated to Latino middle, high schools and college youth. Gift cards were available as prizes and over 30 entries were received. The contest helped to begin to engage youth and raise community awareness of the issue and presence of the coalition.

High school and college students were invited to become full members and were offered a \$500 educational stipend per year for their participation. The coalition recruited high school and college Latino youth ages 14–24 through announcements posted at the schools and direct invitation from coalition members. Interested youth completed a written application process followed by a group interview. Two high school students and two college students were selected from 29 applicants. Youth, with permission from parents if youth were under age 18, agreed to attend and actively participate in coalition meetings, help coordinate a planned photo-voice assessment, and maintain confidentiality.

Each year there was turnover of student membership, and new youth joined the coalition as they learned of coalition work through participation in the community assessments or their high school senior projects. An interview process was not needed after the first year, as adult coalition members were able to assess youth fit from working with them on community assessments and senior projects. Most youth stayed on the coalition for one to two years, with two youth remaining on the coalition for four years.

3. Community assessment and diagnosis

During Israel's et al. (2013) second component of CBPR research, community assessment and diagnosis, community strengths and dynamics are assessed. Three community assessments were conducted in which youth participated. The first assessment was a focus group consisting of Latino teen parents to provide Latino teen parents perspective on the topic of Latina teen pregnancy in the community. For confidentiality reasons, these focus groups were private. However, all partners, including youth members, developed the focus group questions and participated in data analysis and interpretation.

The second community assessment was focus group assessments with Latino parents of adolescents to gain their perspective on the issue of unintended Latina teen pregnancy. The coalition, including youth members, designed the focus group questions. The youth members also participated in designing the focus group format and took an active part in the focus groups. To set the stage for the topic of discussion, at the beginning of the focus group, the youth members led an

overview of the issues which they developed in Spanish and showed a short video produced by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unintended Pregnancy (2013a) called *Demasiado Joven (Too Young)*. Both youth and adult coalition members participated in asking the questions during the focus groups as well as in data analysis and interpretation.

The final community assessment was a Photovoice project examining youth perspectives on teen pregnancy (Noone, Allen, McKenzie, Esqueda, & Ibarra, 2014), using photographs taken by participants to assess a community issue. All coalition members decided on the design of the study, including question prompts for picture taking. The four youth members participated in data collection and served as team leaders for the other participating youth. The youth disseminated results to the community. Several participating youth later joined the coalition or future implementation activities. Similar to other partnerships that included a youth Photovoice project (Pritzker et al., 2012), many of the youth experienced increased community engagement as a result of participating in Photovoice. As one young man commented, "Presenting in public was a great experience and I got the chance to get involved with the community". This participant later became a youth coalition member and qualified for a national leadership experience that he attributed in large part to his participation with the Photovoice assessment.

4. Definition of the issue and design and conduct of research

From the community assessments, key research questions can be generated which can lead to the design and conduct of intervention or policy research (Israel et al., 2013). It was clear from the parent focus groups that parents wanted help communicating with their children about sexuality and pregnancy prevention. Some coalition members had recently completed a research study examining a theater intervention for parents to promote parent–child communication (Noone, Sullivan, Nguyen, & Allen, 2013). This theater-based intervention with adolescent actors used skits and interactive scenes to work on communication problems in talking about sexuality. A focus group of Latino leaders reviewed the intervention and assessed it to be very appropriate for Latino parents, particularly if done in Spanish and with Latino youth as the cast.

Coalition members then designed and conducted a study to evaluate the acceptability of a culturally-relevant parenting intervention using interactive theater to facilitate Latino parent-adolescent communication about sexuality and pregnancy prevention. A youth member who was in her final year of college completed this project as a research practicum for her capstone. This bilingual, bicultural youth member was mentored as a Research Assistant recruiting research participants and collecting baseline and follow-up data.

A 12-member cast of high school youth was recruited in the fall to form the Latino Teen Theater. The research team and the youth cast wrote the skits and interactive scenes based on the focus group results and from the youths' experience. Three scripted scenes framed the issue and provided information and motivation. Three interactive scenes, which allowed active participation from the audience, focused on gaining comfort and skill in communication with adolescents about sexuality. The cast delivered the intervention in Spanish to 66 parents. Results of this study are reported elsewhere (Noone, Castillo, Allen, & Esqueda, 2015).

5. Feedback, interpretation, dissemination, and application/translation of results

The last two phases include 1) analyzing feedback and interpreting the findings, and 2) disseminating and translating research findings (Israel et al., 2013). Youth participated in interpretation of community assessment findings along with the adult members of the coalition. The youth participated in a variety of dissemination activities are outlined in Table 1.

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