Original article

Promoting Policy Development through Community Participatory Approaches to Health Promotion: The Philadelphia Ujima Experience

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ABSTRACT

Background: The Philadelphia Ujima Coalition for a Healthier Community (Philadelphia Ujima) promotes health improvement of girls, women, and their families using a gender framework and community-based participatory research approach to addressing gender-based disparities. Institutional policies developed through community-based participatory research approaches are integral to sustaining gender-integrated health-promotion programs and necessary for reducing gender health inequities. This paper describes the results of a policy analysis of the Philadelphia Ujima coalition partner sites and highlights two case studies.

Methods: The policy analysis used a document review and key informant interview transcripts to explore 1) processes that community, faith, and academic organizations engaged in a community participatory process used to develop policies or institutional changes, 2) types of policy changes developed, and 3) initial outcomes and impact of the policy changes on the target population.

Results: Fifteen policies were developed as a result of the funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office on Women’s Health. Policy changes included 1) healthy food options guidance, 2) leadership training on sexual and relationship violence, and 3) curricula and programming inclusion and expansion of a sex and gender focus in high school and medical school.

Conclusions: Organizational practice changes and policies can be activated through individual-level interventions using a community participatory approach. This approach empowers communities to play an integral role in creating health-promoting policies.

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The policy analysis employed a qualitative research design using a descriptive case study approach. The Policy Analysis Triangle (Walt & Gilson, 1994) was used to guide analysis of developed and implemented policies. This framework includes the analysis of the context (economic, social, cultural factors), process (how the policy was initiated and implemented), and content (the substance of the policy, topics/areas covered or addressed). The model also acknowledges that these factors are all influenced by actors involved in the decision-making process. Walt and Gilson (1994) argue that the importance of understanding the context, process, and actors is often underestimated, and this oversight may hamper the policies’ effectiveness. A keen understanding of the actors involved, processes used to implement change, and the context in which the policy was developed is integral to the development of effective policies (Walt & Gilson, 1994). This framework informed our research design and our description of policy outcomes and implications. Documents and interview transcripts were reviewed for each of the model components.

Document Review

We analyzed existing documents to gain information on policy development and noted organizational practice changes, including implementation processes. Documents consisted of summary and quarterly progress reports submitted by partner sites between 2013 and 2016. Additionally, we reviewed notes from partner discussions during coalition meetings, and quarterly progress reports developed and submitted by the Philadelphia Ujima program staff. Where applicable, we reviewed the actual policy documents that were submitted. Two different reviewers from the research team independently reviewed the documents for the model components, actors involved, context, processes used, and content for development and implementation. Both reviewers discussed any areas of discordance, and additional inquiries were made to the site liaisons to clarify information and achieve consensus. In total, 34 documents (e.g., reports and policies) were reviewed.

Key Informant Interviews

We also assessed 12 transcripts of key informant interviews conducted with site leaders and liaisons. Interviews took place between 2014 and 2016. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted and lasted 30 to 40 minutes. Interviews were conducted as part of the evaluation efforts to understand institutional changes and policies developed as a result of the Ujima coalition and program activities. Discussion domains included policy and practice changes as a result of the program; the role of gender in informing practice and policy efforts; policy content, context, and implementation processes; and perceptions of relevance and impact. Interviews were digitally recorded after completing the consent process and transcribed verbatim. Interview transcripts were reviewed independently by three members of the research team (faculty member with expertise in qualitative research, a research assistant with expertise in qualitative research, and a master of public health student). Transcripts were coded using NVivo 10 software (QSR International, Melbourne, Australia). Themes were categorized initially based on the Policy Analysis Triangle framework (content, actors, process, and context). Additional themes were added as identified. Results were compared across data sources (document reviews and interview transcripts) to ensure accuracy. Last, site liaisons were
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