Social Capital Development in Hispanic Communities

Kathleen G. Westwood
Department of Social Work and Family Studies
Department of Romance Languages
St. Olaf College
1520 St. Olaf Avenue
Northfield, MN 55057
Phone: 253-241-6627
Email: westwood@stolaf.edu

Kathleen Westwood is a senior at St. Olaf College studying Social Work and Spanish. She plans to pursue a Master's degree in Social Work. Kathleen has an interest in medical psychiatric social work with a concentration on access to services for immigrant populations.

Devyani Chandran, MSW, PhD
Department of Social Work and Family Studies
St. Olaf College
1520 St. Olaf Avenue
Northfield, MN 55057
Phone: 507-786-3130
Email: chandrad@stolaf.edu

Dr. Devyani Chandran is a faculty member in the Department of Social Work and Family Studies at St. Olaf College. She received her Ph.D. in Social Welfare from the University of Kansas. Her expertise lies in prevention theory and intervention particularly in the areas of HIV/AIDS and drug and alcohol use. Dr. Chandran has been involved in community efforts to understand drug and alcohol behaviors of Northfield youth as well as provider perceptions about service efficacy and future planning. In addition, she has also been involved in student-college-community collaborations in community-based projects. She aims at playing a continuing role in this effort by adding to existing research and in combining college and community resources to address the issues of drug and alcohol use in the Northfield community.

I attest that I have read the article written by Katie Westwood. As her faculty research supervisor, I also attest that Katie was primarily responsible for the planning, execution, and writing of this article.
Devyani Chandran

Social Capital Development in Hispanic Communities

Abstract

This article examines the development and sustainability of social capital in local

Hispanic communities. Researchers collaborated with a local organization in a Midwestern state

in order to explore the development of social capital programs that serve Hispanic populations in

two program sites. This qualitative study examined the development of bonding and bridging

social capital in Hispanic communities, identified barriers to the development of social capital in

these communities and made suggestions for improving social capital programs through

leadership development, language exchanges and cultural engagement. Implications are

discussed for future planning in local communities that could lead to a smoother integration of

migrant populations in local communities.

Introduction

Social capital includes the development of trust, norms of reciprocity and networks that

individuals can draw upon for their individual or collective benefit (Coleman, 1988; Jacobs,

1961). Robert Putnam (2000) further expanded the definition of social capital by introducing the

concepts of bridging and bonding social capital. Bridging capital or localized capital involves

open networks that are outward looking and encompass people across diverse social cleavages.

Bridging capital connects communities to organizations and people outside the community.

Bonding capital, on the other, hand consists of inward looking networks that tend to reinforce

exclusive identities and homogeneous groups (Putnam, 2000).

Families and communities engage with bonding capital in the course of their daily lives

while they must search out opportunities for bridging capital. These distinctions are important in

the study of social capital development. Communities may be rich in bonding capital but may not

link to the resources of the outside world. Bridging capital is often linked to the strength of local programming that may attract outside participation. Bonding capital, on the other hand, builds on existing relationships and frequent meetings among members of a community (Putnam, 2000).

Social capital development is an essential component for the development of any community (Lin, 2001). Social capital development in local communities provides residents with avenues to interact with resources external to their smaller local communities and form partnerships that may have far reaching consequences for future development and growth (Medoff & Sklar, 1994). The development of social capital also allows individuals and families greater access to other forms of capital such as human and financial capital (Emery & Cornelia, 2006; Herreros, 2004).

This study specifically explores the development of social capital among Hispanic communities. Hispanic communities espouse values such as familism, respect and pride in culture and language that contribute to the building of social capital in their communities (Ruben, Jose & Ryan, 2010). Research indicates that the development and sustainability of social capital can enhance resiliency among Hispanic populations (Nunez, 2009; Trueba, 2010). Beyond the development of community networks and bonds, the development of a strong network of friends from larger communities of residence also allows Hispanic and other immigrant groups to diversify beyond traditional occupations such as agriculture and assimilate to a greater degree in American society (Norah, Alegria, & Sribney, 2007; Philip & Fortuny Lorret, 2007). Social capital development in Hispanic communities can also lead to greater inclusion in the larger communities in which they may live (Shaklee et al. 2010).

While studies have explored indigenous social capital development in Hispanic communities, there is a lack of research that explores the roles that local organizations play in

enhancing social capital among Hispanic communities. Organizations that promote social capital development in communities do so by facilitating growth in groups and networks, enhancing trust and solidarity, fostering collective action, promoting social cohesion and inclusion and encouraging empowerment and political action in local communities (Nieminen et al., 2008).

Researchers collaborated with a local organization and examined the efficacy of social capital programming offered by the organization in Hispanic communities in two Midwestern cities. The organization offered five programs to Hispanic immigrant populations in the area. These programs included: 1) a cooking club that provided a space for people from all backgrounds and all neighborhoods within the community to cook a participant's recipe together; 2) two weekly educational and informational events directed at parents of school-aged children; 3) a free day-camp specifically designed for children in the Hispanic community and 4) a community garden from which participants received a section for their personal gardening and shared produce. The organization aimed to increase trust, networks and leadership within Hispanic communities as well as providing avenues for members in the Hispanic community to become a part of the larger local community.

Methodology

Research Questions

This study addressed the following exploratory research questions:

1) What are successes in the implementation of social capital programs offered in Hispanic communities?

2) What are gaps that impact the development of social capital programs in local Hispanic communities?

Study Design

  This study utilized a qualitative design in order to address the research questions. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with organization leaders and participants in the program. Our institution's Internal Review Board (IRB) reviewed all procedures related to human subject participation.

Sample

  The study made use of a purposive sample. Researchers interviewed eight middle-aged Latina leaders and conducted two focus groups with program participants who were also middle-aged and women. Organization contacts referred leaders and focus group participants to the researchers. Most leaders were fluent in Spanish and a few were conversant in English as well. All participants were given a twenty-dollar gift card in appreciation of their participation in this project.

Semi structured interviews

  Interview questions were developed from the literature and input from the organization head. Questions to the leaders and focus group participants addressed the following broad areas: a) areas of participant involvement in the organization; b) thoughts and opinions on program development and implementation; c) areas of success and challenges in program implementation and 4) recommendations for growth and improvement in programs. Before the first interview, researchers reviewed the initial interview guide. In addition, the researchers prepared for the interview by role-playing and recording questions in order to perfect their technique. Based on feedback received from organization contacts, the questions were further updated. A majority of the participants were not fluent in English; therefore interview guides were translated to Spanish.

After each interview, researchers translated Spanish recordings to English. Researchers reviewed each interview in order to discuss initial findings and strategize about final coding and analysis of findings. Each interview lasted 40-60 minutes. After researchers had completed interviews with the leaders, they conducted a primary analysis of collected data. This allowed researchers to refine questions for the focus groups based on the data collected from interviews. Researchers modified interview questions to be more open-ended allowing for increased discussion among focus group members.

Data analysis

Interviews and focus groups were tape recorded and transcribed in English. ATLAS.ti, qualitative data analysis software, was used for data management. Interview data were coded and analyzed using the constant comparative method prescribed by Lincoln and Guba (1994). Multiple methods were used to maintain rigor. These included conversations with organization contacts to validate findings and documentation of coding decisions and maintenance of memos on analysis. In addition, researchers met to compare results, review codes and analyze interviews before finalizing the analysis for each interview. Feedback on analysis was solicited from organization contacts and the organization's board of trustees.

<p align="center">Findings</p>

Findings describe processes of social capital development from the perspectives of community leaders as well as members of the focus groups. We report on four key themes that include: 1) bonding experiences in local communities; 2) bridging experiences in local communities; 3) increased trust; and 4) leadership development.

Bonding experiences in local communities

Programs offered by the organization facilitated bonding experiences for community members. Participants reported increased levels of social connectedness with fellow community members as a result of program engagement. A leader from the Hispanic community reported, "through the programs we begin to chat more, to have more knowledge of what's your name, who are you, where are you from, as a group of Hispanics." Participants reported that they had several opportunities to engage more meaningfully with each other.

As participants bonded as a community they were able to transmit information on different community concerns and the availability of programs and resources that address issues relevant to the community. One community leader explained, "The ones that go, they end up telling other people of the event and talk about what happened. Yes I believe that they have helped us… and it really has improved our communication."

In addition, the organization provides all of their programs in Spanish. A leader reported that the availability of Spanish language opportunities in programs such as the parent education events "offer(ed) a space for parents to have Spanish language education opportunities where they can talk in the language they're comfortable talking in. And then discuss issues that are specific to their own experiences."

Community leaders and focus group members also reported feeling a greater sense of social connectedness as a result of a program focused on shared culture and traditions. A community leader identified this connection that she felt in one of the parent education events:

"Like for example, this past year we wanted to do a theme of ours, from our culture, what we did was *las posadas.* So we could prepare for making a small dish like those from our traditions from where we are from."

While some programs offered a structured form of interacting and others offered a more casual and natural template for conversation, both forms were found to increase bonding among participants. Leaders and focus group participants reported that social capital development programs with their focus on the use of Spanish language, provision of spaces for community engagement and emphasis on shared traditions had facilitated deeper, more useful and meaningful connections within their community.

Bridging experiences in local communities

Bridging refers to relations that encompass people of diverse backgrounds or social standings (Putnam, 2000). It is more difficult for a program to attract a diverse pool of participants than to attract semi-homogenous or homogenous participants who are more likely to bond. For this reason, we saw less bridging occurring within programs than bonding. Social programs that allowed for cross-cultural topics and discussion led to bridging of the Hispanic community with the larger community. Community leaders and focus group participants identified language barriers as the foremost barrier to building bridging capital. This finding is particularly interesting because language was a factor in positive bonding experiences for participants who connected as a result of speaking Spanish. However, lack of English proficiency proved to be a barrier to bridging with the larger community. In particular, language barriers affected participant access to transportation to programs offered by the organization. A leader said, "Before, yes there was transportation, but it was all in English and you had to call." One leader stated, " I said there has to be communication because sometimes we feel mute and lame. Mute because we don't know English and lame because we can't drive."

While language barriers proved to be a hindrance to bridging, some programs were offered by the organization that built connections through exchange of language. One program

that was particularly successful in promoting cultural bridging was the cooking club where program participants from Spanish speaking and English speaking groups shared recipes in their native languages with the help of interpreters. A community leader described this experience. "We are involved really presenting a recipe and how it's multicultural they invite people from other countries to participate… It's cool too because it creates an atmosphere for talking and chatting and comment." An organization leader described the cooking club as a space "where people from the broader community do come who aren't necessarily a part of [our organization]."

Another possible challenge to bridging lies in cultural differences between members of larger communities and members of local communities. Members of Hispanic communities may be unaware of challenges faced by larger communities and its impact on their families. The organization addressed this gap by providing programs and information that informed members of the Hispanic communities of larger issues in city. A community leader described one such event. "I went, very interesting; the first was about how to talk with our kids about drugs and alcohol. And well, it was a very interesting theme because more than anything, …well with the Hispanics it's less known."

Increased trust

Participants also reported an increased level of trust that resulted from program implementation in local Hispanic communities. Participants stated that there was increased interaction in community spaces. As a result of participation in programs, community members were more likely to talk with their neighbors about problems within their homes or problems faced by the community as a whole. One leader stated, "The people of the community tell us, I'm lacking this or I need this, like the plastic…and they (program participants) go and (seek) help."

Community leaders also described greater willingness of community members to help others more readily after meeting each other through programs. A community leader described how participants help other community members learn about the programs offered, "…people are introduced to each other and talking about the programs that exist." Another community leader described the growing trust between community members and how this led to the building of other networks in the community. "Yes the people are better off knowing one another. Before there were less people and now there are more people and the people go to the same church."

Leadership development

The successful recruitment of leaders was also seen as a key factor in improving connections with local communities. Leadership roles taken by program members led to greater involvement and engagement in program outcomes. Many of these participants described their desire to be a role model for their children as a primary reason for working as a leader. One mother and leader emphasized this point, "I participate because I know that my daughter is going to see in me a mirror. That one day she'll do this too." While leaders were proud of their involvement, they acknowledged that they faced pressures on their time and creativity. One leader spoke of increased responsibility: "The leader has a lot more responsibility because we have to do (everything) the topic, of whatever is going to be discussed… As for the participant, well they are just invited and they come to hear the talk." Leaders felt that their increased knowledge of the community allowed them to communicate program details and promote efforts to bring the community together. As one leader stated "if they (community members) had a question or a doubt and we bring it up (to the organization)…we are a bridge us of connections."

Discussion

Study findings point to challenges in building social capital among Hispanic communities as well as successful efforts that enhance social capital in local communities. Community leaders and focus group participants identified several successes in improving social capital in their communities. Most of these were related to improving bonding in Hispanic communities with a focus on improving social cohesion through participation in programs that emphasized Spanish culture and language as well as increased number of spaces where participants could engage with each other on a regular basis.

Respondents emphasized language as being both an important bonding tool as well as a barrier in bridging with larger communities within which they were embedded. Programs that offered participants an opportunity to share their experiences and culture with the larger community through the use of interpreters and programs that provided participants with information on the workings of larger society (which they may not have had access to in their local settings) were seen to be most successful in promoting bridging. Leadership development was seen as critical in the development and sustainability of social capital programming. While leaders faced pressure because of time constraints and overwhelming responsibility, leaders were proud of the role they played in the organization and in their communities. Overall, programs succeeded in increasing trust within local Hispanic communities and facilitated an exchange of information on community resources and friendships in these communities.

Implications and Next Steps

This study focused primarily on the views of community leaders and a select group of focus group participants for feedback on the efficacy of social capital programs being offered by local organizations. Future studies on the perspective of residents in neighborhoods served by the organization could provide important information on existing social capital in these communities

such as connections with other organizations or intrinsic community and family strengths and resiliency that could be further enhanced by agency input. Longitudinal research is also required to make larger connections between agency programming and its efficacy over the years as younger members of the community grow into adulthood. Further focus on support for leadership development, sustained social capital development and outreach to hard to reach neighborhood residents could lead to enhanced program outcomes. Policy makers may use these findings to develop programs that enhance and support social capital development among local communities. Efforts that develop such programs can lead to smoother integration of migrant populations into local communities while preserving their cultural heritage and strengths.

References

Coleman J (1988) Social capital in the creation of human capital. *Journal of Sociology*
94(Supplement): S95–S120.

Emery, M., & Cornelia, F. (2006). Spiraling up: Mapping community transformation with
community capitals framework. Community Development: *Journal of the Community
Development Society*, *37*(1), 19-35.

Herreros, F. (2004). The problem of forming social capital: Why trust? New York, NY: Palgrave
Macmillan.

Jacobs J. (1961). The death and life of great American cities. New York. The Modern Library.

J. Haas, K. Phillips, D. Sonneborn, C. McCulloch, L. Baker, C. Kaplan *et al.* (2004). Variation in
access to health care for different racial/ethnic groups by the racial/ethnic composition of
an individual's county of residence Medical Care, *42* (7), 707–714.

Lin, N. (2001). Social capital: A theory of social structure and action. Cambridge, UK:
Cambridge University Press.

Lincoln Y and Guba E (1985), *Naturalistic Inquiry*, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications Inc.

Medoff, P., & Sklar, H. (1994). Streets of hope: The fall and rise of an urban neighborhood. Boston: South End Press.

Nieminen, T., Martelin, T., Koskinen, S., Simpura, J., Alanen, E., Tommi Härkänen, & Aromaa, A. (2008). Measurement and socio-demographic variation of social capital in a large population-based survey. *Social Indicators Research, 85*(3), 405-423. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11205-007-9102-x

Norah, E. M., Alegria, M., & Sribney, W. (2007). Social cohesion, social support, and health among Hispanics in the United States. *Social Science & Medicine, 64*(2), 477-477. Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com/docview/230486848?accountid=351

Nunez, A. N. (2009). Hispanic students' transitions to college: A social and intercultural capital perspective. *Harvard Educational Review*, *79*, 22-48.

Philip, J. W., & Patricia Fortuny Loret, d. M. (2007). Religion and social capital among Mexican immigrants in southwest Florida. *Hispanic Studies, 5*(2), 233-253. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.lst.8600252

Putnam, R. (2000) Bowling Alone. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Rubén, P. V. A., José, P. S., & Ryan, L. G. (2010). Para servir*: Social capital among Hispanic

    families in northwest Ohio. *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences, 102*(3), 22-26.

    Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com/docview/820914473?accountid=351

Shaklee, H., Laumatia, L., Luckey, B., Traver, S., Nauman, A., Tifft, K., . . . Hampton, C. (2010).

    Building inclusive communities: A social capital approach. *Journal of Family and*

    Consumer Sciences, 102(3), 44-48. Retrieved from

    http://search.proquest.com/docview/820914271?accountid=351

Trueba, H. T. (2002). Multiple ethnic, racial, and cultural identities in action: From marginality

    to a new cultural capital in modern society. *Journal of Hispanics and Education*, *1*, 7-28.