Community-Academic Collaboration to Prevent Violence in Chicago

RECOMMENDATIONS TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN VIOLENCE RESEARCH

While rates of violence are decreasing on average across Chicago, violence inequality is increasing.[1] The declines in violence are experienced disproportionately in communities on the north side of the city, while many predominantly African-American or Latino communities on the south and west sides experienced steady or increased rates of violence in recent years.[2] Because different communities, and different populations within them, perceive and experience violence differently, those differences must be recognized and understood to effectively prevent violence. Often violence prevention research is developed and carried out with little to no input from the people who live in the communities most affected by violence. The **Community-Academic Collaboration to Prevent Violence in Chicago (CACPVC)** enhances connections between academic, philanthropic, and community partners to build capacity to develop, implement, and evaluate strategies to reduce health disparities related to violence in Chicago.

A series of community meetings, including Open Community Forums and Organization Networking Gatherings, was convened across the city to solicit input from residents, community organizations, researchers, and local funders about the role of research in preventing violence in their communities. The goal of this project was to identify the highest priorities of community residents to improve knowledge about violence in Chicago using community-based participatory research (CBPR). CBPR is an approach that involves all partners in the process and recognizes the unique strengths that each brings. CBPR focuses on a topic that's important to the community aiming to combine knowledge with action to achieve social change.

The project was guided by the direction of an Advisory Board comprised of representatives of community-based organizations, researchers, and funders whose work and expertise focus on issues related to violence prevention in Chicago. A Community Research Collaboration Workgroup was convened to create a Community-Based Participatory Research agenda for violence prevention that reflects the diversity of Chicago neighborhoods and develop a series of recommendations to support community engagement in violence research.

The project was led by Strengthening Chicago's Youth (SCY), a violence prevention collaborative convened by Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago. SCY is Chicago's largest violence prevention collaborative and a catalyst for innovation. Its mission is to connect and mobilize the community around a public health approach to violence prevention. SCY encourage partnerships that strengthen existing efforts so youth can reach their full potential.

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[1]Illinois Violent Death Reporting System (2016) Homicides in Chicago:2005, 2010, and 2015. Accessed: https://www.luriechildrens.org/en-us/research/areas-of-research/programs/child-health-research/Documents/LCH-883-ivdrs-data-brief-july-2016.pdf on November 26, 2017.
[2]Hertz, D. (2013) We've Talked About Homicide In Chicago At Least One Million Times But I Don't Think This Has Come Up. City Notes, Accessed: http://danielhertz.wordpress.com/2013/08/05/weve-talked-about-homicide-inchicago-at-least-one-million-times-but-i-dont-think-this-has-come-up/ on October 2, 2014.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN VIOLENCE RESEARCH

The Recommendations to Support Community Engagement in Violence Research were developed over the course of the 4-year Community-Academic Collaboration to Prevent Violence in Chicago. Input was provided by hundreds of stakeholders including community residents and representatives of community-based organizations, academic researchers, and funders. Further detail about any aspect of this process is available on request.

1. In each of seven communities, an Organization Networking Gathering (attended primarily by people who work at organizations in the community) and an Open Community Forum (attended primarily by community residents) was held. Small group discussions with participants included questions about the role of research in addressing violence, important community stakeholders, the roles community members can play in research, and what factors might be supportive or a barrier in allowing someone to participate in research. Small group discussion responses were recorded by the project's youth scribes, and the Principal Investigator thematically coded and grouped the responses.
2. A report on the findings from the community meetings was shared with the Community Research Collaboration Workgroup. The Workgroup further grouped and refined responses from the community meetings into potential recommendations.
3. The Workgroup discussed whether recommendations should be focused on specific groups of stakeholders, such as community or academic partners. The Workgroup agreed that the primary stakeholders are *researchers*—both academic and community partners participating in research. The Workgroup did spend some time reflecting on whether the recommendations would be adequate to ensure youth engagement in research, which was determined to be an important priority. Several recommendations were developed specifically for funders. Unless otherwise specified, the recommendations apply to all stakeholders involved in community-engaged violence research.
4. Project staff further refined the recommendations to eliminate duplication and ensure specificity to violence-related research where appropriate.
5. The Workgroup reviewed and finalized the Recommendations to Support Community Engagement in Violence Research.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN VIOLENCE RESEARCH

Role of Research in Reducing Violence

- Recognize the unique issues that are specific to research on violence, including high levels of mistrust of data, different perceptions among those who live in communities with high levels of violence and those who do not live in such communities, and lack of connection to the problem for those who have not experienced it.
- Ensure that research is used to identify problems and strengths: make problems more real to those who have not experienced them and give voice to those who do not have a voice.
- Highlight the benefits of research to the community, including developing solutions, evaluating programs, and informing and impacting policy and resource allocation. Research can be used to ask communities how programs should be implemented and to conduct "violence impact assessments."

Role of Community in Violence Research

- Recognize that community members are experts in the issue. Lived experience is just as important as academics' expertise.
- Include all stakeholders (e.g., community residents, youth, perpetrators of violence), not just the perceived "expert" stakeholders (e.g., emergency physicians).
- Develop a working definition of "community" for each project.
- Work with the community to define violence, crime, or other relevant terms for each project.
- Community stakeholders should serve as connectors—they bring other people to the table, help communicate the project's purpose and value, and can alleviate suspicion regarding research.

Relationships and Respect

- Develop a shared mission and vision.
- Build from existing relationships through shared values and purpose.
- Ensure inclusive research design, with equity, transparency and accountability between community and academic partners.
- Ensure continuity, emphasizing the community-academic *team* before, during and after the research project is complete. Commit to engagement in the process and to the shared mission and vision.
- Understand that building trust is a process that takes longer than many people recognize. It is important for academic partners to commit not just to the research study, but to the community's other programs and priorities.
- Be aware of potential disconnects between academic partners and their institutions. Identify opportunities to use the project to inform institutional changes that support community-engaged research.
- Acknowledge past harms and consider how the current research and team are different and how those harms will be avoided.
- Include the voices of youth, parents, and current and former perpetrators of violence. Avoid tokenism and focus on intentional, active inclusion.
- Ensure not just inclusivity, but intersectionality.
- Ensure the research team has knowledge of the community landscape. Someone who feels that a particular community is too dangerous to visit is not suited for participation in the project.

- Acknowledge potential or anticipated outcomes and highlight alternatives. Include a tangible approach to ensure consideration of harms. Provide examples of how similar research has benefitted the community.
- Recognize the potential unintended consequences of the research, and note that a focus on innovation can take resources away from addressing basic needs.

Academic-Community Communication
- Avoid use of jargon and define terms. Be aware of assumptions about what is common knowledge.
- Build diversity among researchers. Research teams should reflect the community engaged in the research. Include young people as the potential next generation of researchers.
- Communication should be empathy-based.
- All team members should be trained on cultural humility.
- Acknowledge and check the privilege associated with being the "researcher."
- Choose community partners based on credibility, community relationships, and knowledge and recognize that someone who is not from the neighborhood is unlikely to be able to speak for the neighborhood. There may be multiple ways for stakeholders to be involved, with different individuals or organizations at the table to ensure different outcomes.

Financial Considerations
- Ensure transparency about the project budget.
- Highlight how research funding can lead to additional funding.
- Align funding with shared values.
- Academic institutions should consider refining priorities so that sharing resources with communities is valued more than bringing research funding to the institution.
- Share information about funding restrictions and decision-making restrictions with all partners.
- Ensure equitable compensation for community partners, recognizing that their expertise is in the community. If compensation is not available, clear communication about non-fiscal benefits is essential.

Training
- Recognize that training of community and academic partners is necessary but not sufficient for good relationships and high quality research.
- Ensure that trainings for community partners build transferrable skills that are of value outside of the project. Institutions should provide opportunities for community stakeholders to take courses.
- To work in communities, academic partners' qualifications should include "soft skills" like community relationships, coalition building, and cultural humility. Training for academic partners may need to be community- and project-specific.

Practical Considerations
- Ensure surveys are reasonable length and written in appropriate language. Surveys should be pilot tested.
- For community events, provide food and beverage, offer child care and consider space needs and limitations (e.g., accessibility, noise levels). Ensure participants' physical and emotional safety, recognizing that different groups have different perspectives on safety.

Research Design
- Be aware of other research being conducted in the community to help avoid "research fatigue."
- Consider innovative data collection methods and involve the community in collecting data.
- Ensure engagement of a wide range of community members, not just those involved in community organizations.
- Balance project discussions between research methods and content.
- Recognize the expertise of both community and academic partners and that their areas of expertise are not mutually exclusive.

Sharing Results
- Ensure clarity about data ownership and access and who can share results. Agree on expectations for authorship of articles and other publications, and ensure community partners are included as authors.
- Engage with research results as "change agents"—focus on action and next steps. Translate results into actionable strategies.
- Share results with people with the power to make decisions about change. Include policy and advocacy stakeholders throughout the research process.
- Support community partners in interpreting results. Data and results should be presented in accessible ways, and community partners' capacity to understand data should be built.
- Share data visually and creatively, using arts, storytelling, etc.

Communication About Data and Use of Data
- Take a strength-based approach to communicating about data.
- Use data to tell a story. Clarify the purpose of the information. Provide information about context. When appropriate, use data to make comparisons among communities.
- Ensure adequate and understandable communication about the nuances of data.
- Anticipate issues of mistrust of data. Be clear about how data were collected and what is included vs. what is not. Consider individual experiences that may be different from community-level data.
- Use data to breakdown stereotypes.
- Engage community residents in interpretation of the data, as a means of giving voice to the community and ensuring the data tell a story.

Recommendations for Funders
- Simplify reporting processes and requirements.
- Share the power of defining "success" with community stakeholders.
- Prioritize funding mechanisms that allow time for community and academic partners to co-create.
- Ensure connection with communities. Avoid funding projects in isolation, without reflecting community context.
- Allow for reporting negative evaluation findings without jeopardizing funding. There is no "quick fix" for violence, and negative results may highlight an opportunity for change.

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