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Building Capacity and Recruiting for HIV Epidemiologic Studies with African, Caribbean and other Black Communities in Understudied Urban-Rural Locales: The BLACCH Study

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Building Capacity and Recruiting for HIV Epidemiologic Studies with African, Caribbean and Other Black Communities in Underserved Urban-Rural Locales: The BLACCH Study

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Abstract

CHALLENGE: London reportedly has Ontario's 3rd-highest HIV infection rate, and a small (2.2%) but growing African, Caribbean and other Black (ACB) population. Although targeted for HIV prevention efforts, ACB people are hard to reach for research and programming, especially in London and similar urban-rural locales with few ACB-specific resources. In Canada's ACB population, HIV is most commonly spread through heterosexual contact, yet cultural and religious norms often discourage discussions about sex or sexuality. Homophobia, racism and stigma discourage ACB people from seeking information about HIV/AIDS. In addition, few researchers have worked with local ACB communities; trust is lacking between ACB communities and service providers; and there are ethnic divisions in ACB communities. The BLACCH Study is a cross-sectional study about health and HIV in London's ACB population.

OBJECTIVES: To build research capacity and enhance recruitment.

ACTIVITIES: These included: following community-based research (CBR) principles; networking with stakeholders (ACB people, service providers, and researchers); performing semi-ethnographic work; forming a multi-stakeholder team; interviewing stakeholders; partaking in community events; sending periodic e-bulletins; engaging media; and employing venue-based and snowball sampling.

RESULTS: These methods helped: identify relevant survey topics and recruitment methods; build relationships with stakeholders; promote the study; identify individuals to help with recruitment; and learn about community dynamics.

CONCLUSION: CBR is necessary for conducting quality epidemiologic research with hard to reach populations.

Challenge

- ❖ London, Ontario is the province's 4th largest city, but has the province's 3rd highest HIV infection rate [1] and African, Caribbean and other Black (ACB) people are 12.6X more likely to contract HIV than any other group in Canada [2]
- ❖ About 2% of London's population self-identifies as Black (~7,600) [3], and these individuals are mainly of African or Caribbean heritage, and 50% of the ACB population in London is foreign born [4]
- ❖ Experiences with racism, exploitation and social exclusion have had lasting impacts and have created barriers to reaching ACB people for research and service delivery [5]
- ❖ London has few resources specifically directed at ACB people
- ❖ Among ACB people in Canada, HIV is usually spread heterosexually [2], but cultural and religious norms discourage discussions about sex [6], and therefore pose barriers to discussing HIV transmission and prevention
- ❖ Homophobia, racism and stigma in ACB communities also pose barriers to accessing ACB people for HIV research and services [7]
- ❖ Little information about ACB people is available, and no information was located for ACB people in London, Ontario or similar settings
- ❖ No recommended methods were located for successfully recruiting ACB people into epidemiologic research taking place in urban-rural locales similar to London, Ontario
- ❖ The structure of the community in London warrants different recruitment strategies for reaching ACB people due to inter- and intra-ethnic divisions in the community
- ❖ The Black, African and Caribbean Canadian Health (BLACCH) Study aims to collect usable epidemiologic data from this population

Objectives

- ❖ To build capacity to conduct epidemiologic research with ACB people residing in London, Ontario
- ❖ To enhance recruitment of ACB people into an epidemiologic study that uses convenience sampling for a self-administered, mail questionnaire

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Activities

Networking

- ❖ Attending meetings of community organizations
- ❖ Volunteering at community events
- ❖ Attending related events
- ❖ Connecting with business owners

Semi-Ethnographic Work

- ❖ Observing community members at events
- ❖ Traveling throughout the city and making notes where ACB people congregate
- ❖ Locating ACB organizations, media outlets, and community events

Capacity Building for a Multi-Stakeholder Team

- ❖ Presentations and discussions about HIV in ACB communities
- ❖ Training about research methods: interviewing, survey design, community-based research, social media

Semi-Structured Interviews

- ❖ Open-ended questions
- ❖ 30 interviews: 22 ACB community members, 5 ACB service providers, 3 non-ACB service providers
- ❖ Topics: HIV/AIDS, general health, social determinants of health, research methods

Posters and Information Sheets

- ❖ Hanging posters in libraries
- ❖ Giving out information sheets about the project

Outreach at Events and Selected Venues

- ❖ Sunfest
- ❖ Afro festa
- ❖ Library outreach
- ❖ Black History Month 2011 events
- ❖ Outreach at businesses
- ❖ Soccer tournaments
- ❖ Networking events
- ❖ Secondary schools
- ❖ Conferences

Electronic Bulletins

- ❖ Updates to participants and other stakeholders

Media: Interviews and Advertisements

- ❖ Radio interviews
- ❖ Public Service Announcements
- ❖ Newspaper advertisement

Venue-Based and Snowball Sampling

- ❖ Recruiting during outreach
- ❖ Asking participants to recommend others

Reminders

- ❖ Collect names and contact information
- ❖ Reminders one week after receiving survey
- ❖ Regular reminders every two weeks
- ❖ Change tone of reminders at one-month mark

Results

Get to know and understand the community

- ❖ Learn history of the community
- ❖ Understand distribution of influence in the community
- ❖ Identify influential community members
- ❖ Learn that Caribbean and multi-generational Canadian Blacks tend to socialize together, but there are some instances in which these communities are at odds
- ❖ Learn that African communities tend to be more cohesive and collective than other Black communities
- ❖ Learn that Caribbean and Black Canadian communities generally have one-on-one relationships and typically do not have community organizations

Team has sufficient knowledge and skills to undertake the research

- ❖ Team knowledgeable about structures and patterns in the local ACB communities
- ❖ Team has skills that can be used on other projects
- ❖ Team is knowledgeable about the needs of an epidemiologic research project

Identify community concerns and appropriate research methods

- ❖ Participants prefer a general health survey, not just a survey about HIV
- ❖ Participants are not comfortable using slang to describe behaviours or health conditions
- ❖ Participants are willing to recruit people in their networks for the survey

Effectively promote the project and recruit potential respondents

- ❖ Reach a broad audience using posters and media
- ❖ Make contact with individuals and leave them with information about the project
- ❖ Increase community's knowledge about the project and trust
- ❖ Keep community informed and increase sense of ownership
- ❖ Identify over 500 potential participants
- ❖ Distribute approximately 450 surveys in 8 months
- ❖ Recruit participants from a cross-section of the community
- ❖ All eligible participants respond to sensitive questions

Increase proportion of surveys returned

- ❖ Overall the proportion of surveys returned increased from 20% to 35%
- ❖ Over 60% of surveys returned among persons receiving reminders
- ❖ Increase in snowballing

Conclusion

Community-based research is an appropriate approach to conducting epidemiologic research with hard to reach populations. The more engaged the community is, the more likely it is to get members of hard to reach populations to participate in the research.

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