

The Commissioner’s Advisory Council on Health Disparity and Health Equity

Proposed Study Overview

March 5, 2014

Overview

The proposed study is designed to assess level(s) of collaboration among members of the Advisory Council on Health Disparity and Health Equity (ACHDHE) by examining their interactions. Furthermore, the study will gauge the Council member’s perception of collaboration and the extent of their interactions with their local communities to further the Council’s mission “to promote and advocate for the elimination of health disparities among all racial and ethnic minorities and other underserved populations in Virginia”.

The proposed study will address the following research questions:

1. What is overall connectedness among ACHDHE members?
2. What are the attitudes and perceptions of collaboration held by Council members?
3. How have/are Council member’s promoting the Council’s mission in their local communities?
4. What are the benefits and drawbacks to collaboration?

Research Team

Dr. Portia Cole, ACHDHE Member, Virginia Union University (VUU) – Department of Social Work and Sociology (Principal Investigator)

Dr. Elizabeth Locke, ACHDHE Chairperson, Old Dominion University (ODU) – School of Physical Therapy and Athletic Training (Collaborator)

Dr. Tamarah Holmes, Social Network Analysis (SNA) Subject Matter Expert (Consultant), Community Block Development Grant Coordinator, Chesterfield County - Department of Budget and Management, Chesterfield, Virginia.

Method

The proposed study will utilize social network analysis methodology and qualitative methods (individual interviews) to address the research questions. Social network analysis (SNA) is a method of collecting and analyzing data from multiple individuals or organizations that may be interacting with one another (Provan et al., 2005). It involves the measuring and mapping of relationships and flows between people, groups, organizations, computers, URLs, and other connected information/knowledge entities. The nodes in the network are the people and groups while the links show relationships or flows between the nodes. SNA provides both a visual and a mathematical analysis of various types of relationships. Interviews will be conducted with Council members to obtain additional information regarding their attitudes and perception of collaboration, as well as the extent of their interactions in their local communities in furthering the Council’s mission. For example, Dr. Cole is planning to have a screening of the award winning documentary “Unnatural Causes’ at her institution to enlighten members of the

university community about the root causes of socioeconomic and racial inequalities in health. This topic is particularly significant given that the VUU was founded in 1865, right after the end of the Civil War. Its purpose then was to provide access and opportunities for newly freed slaves of the Commonwealth of Virginia and the surrounding states. The fact that racial inequalities in health persist should serve as a “call to action” for institutions such as VUU that primarily serve communities of color. SNA will assist in capturing the effects of this type of linkage between an ACHDHE member and her community. The proposed study aims to capture similar type linkages between other ACHDHE members and their communities. For example, Dr. Locke is teaching doctoral students in the ODU Physical Therapy program about the importance of cultural competence and health equity in their professional issues course. In this way, Dr. Locke has created an explicit linkage of the ACHDHE mission with a specific segment of the ODU learning community. SNA would assist us in tracking the ways in which the students apply the principles they have been exposed to in Dr. Locke’s class within their practice of physical therapy especially after graduation.

Proposed Survey Instrument

The Level of Collaboration Scale (Cross et al., 2009) could be administered via an online survey tool such as Survey Monkey to ACHDHE members who wish to participate. ACHDHE members could be asked to rate their level of collaboration with other members of ACHDHE and/or organizations within their respective communities in the areas of networking, cooperation, coordination, coalition, and collaboration. Modification of existing survey items may be necessary to address the unique questions proposed for this study.

Proposed Timeline

If the proposed study is approved by Dr. Levine, VDH Health Commissioner, surveys could be potentially administered in late spring 2014 or early summer. Preliminary findings could be presented at the October, 2014 ACHDHE meeting by the research team. Dr. Cole will receive financial support for this project from a faculty mini-grant. VDH will not incur any expenses for the proposed research study.

Introduction of SNA to ACHDHE Members

In order to provide ACHDHE members with an overview of the topic and to determine whether there is interest by ACHDHE members to participate in such a study, Dr. Holmes could be invited to an upcoming ACHDHE meeting to make a presentation. Ms. Karen Reed may decide if and when Dr. Holmes could make a presentation to the ACHDHE group in consultation with Dr. Levine.

Conclusion

While SNA focuses on patterns of relationships, qualitative data focuses on the experiences of an individual and provides an in-depth understanding of the real world. Social network analysis coupled with qualitative data will produce a much more enriched understanding of the ACHDHE. In addition, findings from the proposed study could enhance the Council’s work within their respective communities as well as their advice with regard to VDH’s legislative/policy priorities.

References

Cross, J.E., Dickmann, E., Newman-Gondar, R., & Fagan, J.M. (2009). Using mixed-method design and network analysis to measure development of interagency collaboration. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 30(3), 310-329.

Provan, K.G., Veazie, M.A., Staten, L.K., & Teufal-Shone, N.I. (2005). The use of network analysis to strengthen community partnerships. *Public Administration Review*, 65(5)
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