Building Communities and Supporting Families: Theory and Research in Prevention Science

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Overview

➢ A social organization framework
  ➢ Building community capacity
    ➢ Leveraging toward resilience

➢ Applications to research and practice
  ➢ Community health
  ➢ Military family support systems
  ➢ Youth adjustment to parental deployment
  ➢ Intimate partner violence
  ➢ Retention of long-term care professionals
  ➢ Recovery from natural disaster (Hurricane Katrina)

➢ Implications for prevention science
Theorizing and Research Pathways

- Since 1995 concerned with sustaining community-based programs for families (government and foundation funded)
- Since 2000 concerned with broader approach to building capacity of communities to reach desired results (government funded)
  - Initiated with focus on observing military family communities
  - 2000 community capacity model
  - Virginia Tech, UNC-Chapel Hill, Bryn Mawr College collaboration
- More recently expanded to community social organization
  - Community capacity, network structures, and social capital
  - Broader substantive focus
Nexus of Theory, Research, & Practice

- Theory
- Basic Research
- Evaluation Research
- Consultation to Communities
- Consultation to Government
- Policy and Practice Results

INSTITUTE FOR SOCIETY, CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

Virginia Tech
Invent the Future
Community Connections Elements

- Who we know
- How well we know each other
- How close we feel to them
- Our experience with them
- What we expect of them
- What we do together of importance
- Quality of life in our communities

- Nature of efforts to improve community life
- How programs and professionals help us
- How we can sustain what is good and helpful
- The best way to bring about change
- Shared responsibility and collective competence
Social Organization

Networks, Social Capital, and Community Capacity
Social Organization Theory: Definition of Social Organization

- Values, norms, processes, and behavior patterns within a community that organize, facilitate, and constrain interactions among community members.

- Process by which communities achieve desired results for individuals and families, including ability to demonstrate resiliency.

- Includes networks of people, exchanges and reciprocity in relationships, accepted standards of social support, and social controls that regulate behavior and interaction.
Social Organization Theory Model

- **Our approach**
  - Shifts social organization theory from single plane of explanation on disorganization and delinquency
  - Moves the theory toward a more layered approach to communities
  - Presents the theory as having a more fundamental role in explaining broader family system phenomena
Social Organization
Structure and Process

- Differentiation of structure from process
  - Structure pertains to configuration and composition
  - Process involves operations and methods of working
  - Process occurs within structural frameworks
  - Processes provide linkage between social structure and effects on families
Social Organization Theory: Focus on Processes

- Main focus is on processes
  - Networks
  - Social Capital
  - Community Capacity

- Relationships between them
  - Networks provide context for the development of social capital, and for building community capacity
Social Organization Theory: Networks

- Primary ways through which community life is enacted
- Informal networks comprise web of relationships with friends, neighbors, work associates
- Formal networks associated with agencies and organizations
- Voluntary and obligatory relationships
Social Organization Theory: Networks

- Network effects levels
  - Action element of our framework
  - Nexus of informal and formal networks
  - First level-within a network
  - Second level-between like networks
  - Third level-between dissimilar networks

- Network configurations provide leverage for achieving results through generation of social capital and production of community capacity
Social Organization Theory: Social Capital

- Information, reciprocity, and trust
  - Aggregate of resources (information, opportunities, and instrumental support)
- Arise from reciprocal social relationships
- Results from participation in formal and informal settings
- Social capital observed in actions of civic groups, faith communities, and any number of community-based groups
- Increases odds of achieving results otherwise not attained
Social Organization Theory: Community Capacity

- **Shared responsibility**
  - For general welfare of the community and its individual members
  - Sentiments

- **Collective competence**
  - Taking collective action, confronting situations

- **Assumptions**
  - Concern directed at community as a whole and at particular elements, action is beyond expression of positive sentiments, action is proactive and reactive, action targeted at threats and at normative situations
Social Organization Theory: Family and Community Results

- Consequences of effective social organization
- Desired results (examples, safety, health and well-being, family resilience)
- Results not owned by any particular group but valued across community
- Identified results assist to determine leverage points for change
- Moves theory from interesting framework to theory of action
Social Organization: Summary

- Need for theorizing that connects families and communities
- Social organization provides linkage framework
- Theory focused on action and community change

- There are leverage points that can be mobilized to support families and communities
- Consequent set of considerations for professionals
  - Program developers
  - Program and community researchers
Applications

- Community health
- Military family support systems
- Youth adjustment to parental deployment
- Intimate partner violence
- Retention of long-term care professionals
- Recovery from natural disaster (Hurricane Katrina)
Community Capacity and Health

- Health promotion and illness prevention
- Community capacity as key protective factor
- Juxtaposition of formal and informal networks
  - Role of formal networks in informal support
- High capacity communities care and act
- Model reflects “social fabric”

Military Family Support Systems

- Originally focused on retooling U.S. Air Force family support system
  - Streamlining the system, addressing “silos”
- Conducted Air Force wide community needs and assets survey
- Trained base personnel from Results Management planning perspective
- Demonstrated more effective service delivery

Youth Adjustment to Parental Deployment

- Funded by Military Family Research Institute
- Focus group analysis of youth experiences
- Ambiguous loss and uncertainty
- Network social capital
  - Informal and formal networks of social care

Intimate Partner Violence

- Prevention-oriented approach to community-level violence
  - Accessed community capacity approach
- Network-driven prevention efforts suggested
- Implications: Community presented as a “place”, a “target”, and as a “force” for prevention

Retention of LTC Professionals

- National Institute on Aging funding (Grant 1-R03-AG020408-01 to Karen Roberto and Jay A. Mancini)
- Problem of high turnover rates among LTC professionals
- Influences of individual, family, and community factors
- Key finding: Being more “connected” to the workplace and workplace colleagues related to retention intentions, job satisfaction, and job commitment

Recovery from Natural Disaster

- Funded by *America’s Promise: The Alliance for Youth*
  - Jay Mancini and Lydia Marek, Investigators
- Consultation currently underway
- Focus on sustainability of programs for children and families in New Orleans, Gulf Coast (MS), and Houston
- Planning orientation grounded in building community capacity, collaboration, sustainability, and results management frameworks

Implications for Prevention Science

- Implications informed by theorizing, research, and practice experience
  - General program development
  - Theories of change
  - Understanding the intervention
  - Differentiating structure and process
  - Specifying results
Implications for Program Development

- Building community capacity
  - Nexus of formal and informal networks
  - Important program function of formal networks is to build informal networks

Implications for Theories of Change

- Prevention/intervention science focuses on expectations of change, and the trail that change follows.
- Social organization theory tracks change:
  - What people know
  - With whom they interact
  - Who they ultimately trust
  - Level of regard for others
  - Collaboration with others
- Theory provides leads on change linkages
Implications for Understanding the Intervention

- Ongoing challenge of knowing elements of prevention/intervention that make a difference
- Social organization theory interface between networks and social capital
- Products of social capital accrue from network interaction, and reflect what may make a difference in how community members interact and cooperate.
- Programs should focus on network elements
Implications for Understanding Structure and Process

- Theory suggests we must distinguish structure from process
- Confusing configurations with functions may lead to misspecification of what works to influence community change
- Within a particular program, is change furthered by a curriculum, program leader attributes, or interaction among program participants?
Implications for Specifying Results

- Exactly what in communities should change?
- Theory highlights importance of results that can be clearly articulated
  - Provides guidance for indicators
- “Program results” and “community results”
  - Former tied to particular programs
  - Latter responsibility of programs, organizations, agencies
Conclusions and Next Steps

- Potential for social organization theory to provide bridges between community processes, community programs, and families
- Theory provides framework for program development and for research
Next Steps in Our Research Program

- Provide greater precision to community concepts
- Improve measures of social organization concepts, particularly community capacity
- Clarify linkages between concepts
- Develop clearer sense of change leverage points, their importance, and their likelihood of change
- Discern layers and levels in communities, organizations, and in families
  - Twists and turns
  - To and Fro processes
Project Next Steps: *Family Justice*

- National Advisory Board, Richmond VA project, *Family Justice* (NYC)
  - Bureau of Justice Assistance funding
  - Resilience approach to families
  - Community social networks power
  - Focused on families in poverty
    - In particular concerning those at greatest risk for cycling in and out of the criminal justice system
Project Next Steps: ISCE Cross-National Collaborations

- Part of responsibility connected with role as ISCE Senior Research Fellow
- Goal of connecting Virginia Tech researchers with researchers from Canada, Ireland, England, and Scotland
- *Human Development and the Lifespan: Antecedents, Processes, and Consequences of Change*
- Collaborating universities: University of Guelph, University of Edinburgh, University of Leeds, London South Bank University, Trinity College/University of Dublin
- September meeting at Virginia Tech center in Riva San Vitale, Switzerland (Ticino Canton)
- Products: Book on Transformation, proposal development
Project Next Steps: Oak Ridge National Laboratory Collaboration

- Institute for Advanced Biometrics and Social Systems Studies (IABS3), Oak Ridge Associated Universities
- Enhancement of community and regional resilience to the impact of natural or man-made catastrophic events
  - Focus on disadvantaged populations
- Role of community capacity and social organization
- Funding through Department of Homeland Security
Project Next Steps: Immigrant and Refugee Family Issues (cross-national research)

- Led by University of Guelph (Ontario)
- Focused on well-being of immigrant and refugee children and their families
- Cross-national research collaboration between U.S. and Canadian universities
- Planning conference in June
- Annual conference in November ("Social organization and the well-being of immigrant and refugee families")
Social Organization References

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