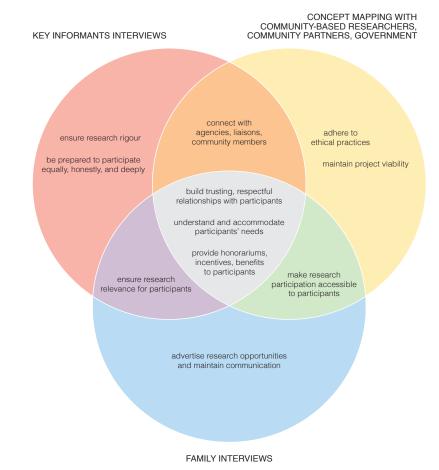# Conducting Community-Based Research with Populations Living in Vulnerable Conditions: An Examination of Challenges, Considerations, and Best Practices

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BACKGROUND

- Engaging people living in vulnerable conditions in research can increase the quality and relevance of findings as well as positively influence participants' well-being. Participation for these populations, however, can be fraught with feelings of mistrust, disrespect, and stigma, as well as accompanied by other participation barriers. Thus, creating collaborative, respectful, and positive research environments is essential. Three interrelated studies aimed to understand how researchers and community partners could best work with populations living in vulnerable conditions when conducting CBR.
- We collected data in three phases:
  - » (1) interviews with 14 key informants (i.e., researchers, community partners, policy makers, and funders) in Edmonton
  - » (2) interviews with 25 Edmonton families living in vulnerable conditions
  - » (3) group concept mapping with community-based researchers, community partners, and government (a) 37 participants generated positive practice statements and then (b) 26 participants sorted practices into themes and rated practices on how often they used them and how effective they perceived them to be.

KEY INFORMANTS INTERVIEWS

CONCEPT MAPPING WITH COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCHERS, COMMUNITY PARTNERS, GOVERNMENT

ensure research rigour

be prepared to participate equally, honestly, and deeply

connect with agencies, liaisons, community members

adhere to ethical practices

maintain project viability

build trusting, respectful relationships with participants

understand and accommodate participants' needs

provide honorariums, incentives, benefits to participants

ensure research relevance for participants

make research participation accessible to participants

advertise research opportunities and maintain communication

FAMILY INTERVIEWS

HIGHLIGHTS OF FINDINGS

Challenges

- Key informants experienced several challenges, including participant language/literacy barriers, building trusting relationships, participation accessibility, families' crises, cultural protocols, research process, engagement/recruitment, offering incentives, and knowledge mobilization.
- Families discussed participation challenges, including lack of time, research question content and format, others' perceptions/discrimination/stigma, participation accessibility, and language barriers.
- CBR stakeholders noted several challenges, including lack of time, high mobility of some participants, building trusting relationships and breaking down suspicions and mistrust, language and cultural barriers, ethics protocols and consent, low literacy levels, and meeting participants' basic needs.

Positive Practices

Positive practices are illustrated in Figure 1. In all three studies, participants emphasized the importance for researchers to build trusting, respectful relationships with their participants; understand and accommodate participants' needs (e.g., culture, language, literacy level); and ensure participants benefit from taking part in research (e.g., honorariums, incentives, new knowledge).

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND/OR PRACTICE

Improving the health and well-being of children, families, and communities is at the forefront of many government initiatives. To enhance the effectiveness of such initiatives as well as to promote policy change for social justice, positive practices and considerations for ways to best include populations living in vulnerable conditions in programs, services, and research must be put in to place. The learnings from the studies in this research project have the potential to inform and enhance stakeholder engagement practices across disciplines, participant groups, and community issues.

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