

Promotion of Knowledge, Relationships and Institutional Changes Produce Outcomes

Communities regularly utilize collaborative partnerships, such as coordinating councils and coalitions, to create systems change and address social issues. Although collaborative partnerships hold a high status by communities, the research field remains uncertain about how these partnerships best employ efforts to impact long-term outcomes. Research examining coalition effectiveness continues to over-rely on distal outcomes (e.g. behavior change) instead of more proximal, or intermediate, processes by which coalitions influence long-term changes.

In response, researchers Shabnam Javdani and Nicole Allen at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign conducted a study examining the extent to which coalitions affect proximal outcomes, how these proximal outcomes may interrelate to each other and their relationships to long-term outcomes. For the study, the researchers identified three important proximal outcomes of coalition efforts: the promotion of knowledge, relationships and institutional change. The researchers hypothesized that promotion of knowledge and relationships would explain differences in distal community-level outcomes, and institutionalized change would mediate the relationship (i.e., institutionalized change is necessary for the promotion of knowledge and relationship to impact distal outcomes). For community coalitions, the results of this study hold importance with respect to the factors that influence a group's work to achieve long-term outcomes.

How did they do it?

For the study, researchers surveyed via mail 654 council members from 21 Family Violence Coordinating Councils (FVCC) in one Midwestern State. The FVCCs differed in size of membership from 13 to 353 individuals and council age of 4 to 18 years. Each of the FVCCs engaged in an array of strategies to produce a coordinated response to intimate partner violence, with the most accepted strategies including the provision of domestic violence trainings and community education.

The FVCC Committee Member Survey consisted of three scales to evaluate the proximal outcomes of councils: promotion of knowledge, relationships and institutionalized change. For each scale, FVCC members specified the degree of their contribution to the FVCC by utilizing a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 6. For example, members rated promotion of knowledge based on perceived changes in their

knowledge as an effect of participating in the FVCC, such as knowledge about intimate partner violence and other members' responsibilities and restrictions. Additionally, researchers utilized a five-item scale to measure the degree to which members' viewed their FVCC's success at impacting distal community outcomes, such as the degree to which councils' efforts guided survivor safety, batterer accountability and public education.

What did they find?

The study suggests that survey participants perceived their councils as more effective in influencing knowledge and relationships of their stakeholders than institutional changes and distal community changes. Participants reported that their councils promoted proximal outcomes—especially knowledge and relationships—at an increased level. Council members also indicated promotion of institutionalized change, but to a lesser degree. The same trend appears with the promotion of distal community outcomes, with members reporting the promotion of distal change at a lower level than that of knowledge and relationships.

Additionally, the results suggest proximal outcomes significantly relate to each other and distal outcomes. For example, the results suggest that the promotion of knowledge is necessary for councils to build relationships that will bring about institutionalized change. In this case, council members increase knowledge and promote changes in policies and programs through their relationships. The relationships council members have with each other at the individual-level and via their organizations significantly promote distal changes in intimate partner violence. Furthermore, institutionalized change mediates the connection between knowledge and distal change. This means institutionalized changes are one important element needed to achieve distal outcomes and that it is important for members to be knowledgeable about what specific changes are needed in the formal response to intimate partner violence to bring about the right types of institutionalized change that will make a difference in the long run.

What Coalitions Can Do

- ✓ **Build a strong coalition membership** A coalition membership of individuals from varying sectors and organizations of the community provides an endless amount of knowledge, resources and networks to the coalition. Strong membership allows coalition members to benefit and learn from the relationships they develop with each other. In turn, the community benefits by encouraging members to advocate for program and policy changes.
- ✓ **Keep coalition memberships knowledgeable** For coalition membership to create population-level change, members need to have knowledge and awareness about what specifically needs to change. Coalition staff and leadership should consistently provide members with accurate, timely and relevant information through training opportunities, presentations, emails or handouts.
- ✓ **Implement program and policy community changes** Community coalitions need to promote the implementation of programs and policies to achieve long-term population changes. This study complements the CADCA theory that coalitions possess the roles and responsibilities of community change agents. For coalitions to best achieve their role as community change agents, coalitions need to review their local data to determine what strategies most appropriately fit their local conditions and root causes

To review the original source, please refer to:

Javdani, S., & Allen, N.E. (2011). Proximal outcomes matter: A multilevel examination of the processes by which coordinating councils produce change. *American Journal of Community Psychology*. 47:12-27.