Implementing the Strengthening Families Program in Montreal's Black Communities:
Integrating Community Development with Prevention Programming

Dr Vandna Sinha, Anne-Marie Piché, M.S.W.,
Dr. Nico Trocmé

CRCF Research Seminar, McGill University
January 14th 2009

African Canadian Development Prevention Network

- A network of organizations serving the Black Anglophone community in Montreal

- Grew out of analysis of past efforts in the Black community

- Dual goals of prevention and community development

- Families of youth at risk a target for prevention
  - Multi-site implementation of Strengthening Families Program
  - CDNBCA, NDGBCA, LasalleBCA (pilot)

Strengthening Families Program

- 14-session family skills training program for high-risk, 6-12 year old children and their parents

  ◦ Designed to increase family protective factors (family organization, communication, relationships and parenting skills, stress management, problem solving).

  ◦ Aims to decrease risk factors (substance abuse, depression, violence and aggression, delinquency, school failure).

- Parent and child training components with learning modules and family activities.

Beginnings of Our Partnership

- African Canadian Development Prevention Network sought evaluation support from McGill

- Health Canada 3-year funding for implementation & evaluation of Strengthening Families Program (SFP)

  ◦ a 'best-practice' program from the U.S.

- CRCF agreed to conduct evaluation of SFP and a 'community study' which examined context of SFP implementation

Study Design: Community Study

○ Objective: Describe SFP implementation in the context of ACDPN's community development and prevention agenda

○ Qualitative methods

- Semi-structured interviews,
  - ACDPN management team
  - Leaders of ACDPN member organizations
  - SFP trainers

- Participant observation,
  - ACDPN management meetings
  - SFP sessions
  - Other network meetings/events

Study Design: Pre-post Evaluation

Objectives:

-Description of participating children and families

-Description of short-term program impacts.

Outcome levels:

-Children's individual and social adjustment levels as reported by their parents

-Parent reported family functioning and parenting skills

Sample: n=18 parents (based of pre and post test completion).

Description of participants

- Parents:
  - single (and joint custody 80.9%);
  - mothers (91.5%)
- Children:
  - Boys (72.3%)
  - Mean age (8.5) at pre-test
  - School grade - first grade (31.9%)
  - Special education use (12.8%)
- Family size: one child (27.7%) ;two-child (25.5%); three-child 21.3% .
- 27.7% report using other Black community services.

Significant Parent & Family Findings

Scales	Pre-test Mean (std)	Post-test Mean (std)
Parental Efficacy*	4.28 (0.57)	4.67 (0.59)
Parental Supervision*	3.54 (0.57)	3.96 (0.56)
Parental Involvement *	3.94 (0.83)	4.43 (0.39)
Family Organization**	2.68 (0.87)	3.63 (0.68)

Statistical significance of pre-post difference:*p≤0.05; ** p≤0.001

Significant Child Findings

Child Scales	Pre-test Mean (std)	Post-test Mean (std)
Overt Aggression+	2.07 (0.70)	1.73 (0.43)
Covert Aggression*	2.01 (0.46)	1.67 (0.26)

Statistical significance of pre-post difference: + p≤ 0.10 ;*p≤0.05; **

Summary of Results

- Significant Positive Changes in Several Scales

- Consistent pattern of small, non-significant improvements

  - Child Scales:, Concentration, Depression, Hyperactivity, Impulsivity, Criminal Behaviour, Sociability.

  - Parent/ Family scales: Family Conflict, Parenting Skills, Positive Parenting, Family Communication, Family Cohesion.

  - Possible shift in parental standards for self-assessment

  - Small sample size: n=18
    - (18 cases pre + post, + 2 missing+ 7 pilot cases (post only))

The Context of SFP Implementation

- Implementation process shaped by community and organizational context
  - Low levels of bridging and formal social capital
  - Unstable community organizations
  - Limited development resources

- Long term implementation of prevention program
  - Formal development of community organizations
  - Access to institutionalized resources
  - Prioritization of community/organizational goals and outcomes

Social Capital

- "The aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition." Bourdieu (1985,1980)

- Collective resources embedded in social networks Portes (1998)
    - ◦ Depends on trust and reciprocity
    - ◦ Can flow from both "strong" and "weak ties"
    - ◦ Can be purposively developed

- Social Capital enhances capacity for:
    - ◦ Exercise of social control
    - ◦ Provision of informal social support
    - ◦ Access to resources

Key Concepts in Social Capital Theory

- Bonding social capital – resources flowing from within-group ties, which serve as "glue" to hold a community together. (Putnam 2000)

- Bridging social capital – resources flowing from between-group ties which provide linkages to external assets and information. (Putnam 2000)

- Informal social capital - resources flowing from kinship and friendship networks or from loosely organized groups of people with common interests. (Putnam & Gross 2002)

- Formal social capital – resources flowing from organizations with recognized officers, membership requirements, dues, meetings, etc. (Putnam & Gross 2002)

Montreal's Black Anglophone Community

- Major changes starting in late 1960s/1970s
  - Shifts in immigration policies open doors to Black immigrants.
    - Population growth (Torczyner & Springer, 2001)
      - 50% of Montreal's Black community immigrated after 1975
    - Diversification of population & communities
      - Influx of Anglophone Carribean Islanders, Haitians, Africans . . .
    - Geographic expansion
      - beyond community traditionally centered in Little Burgundy
  - Changes in language laws cement position as "double minority."
    - ~20% of Black Montrealers speak English only (Torczyner & Springer, 2001)
  - Diminished emphasis on unifying goals.

Limitations on Bridging & Formal Social Capital

- Bridging social capital
  - Fragmentation of diverse "Black community" (communities)
  - Limited access to francophone institutional resources

- Formal social capital Reliance on volunteers & individual leaders
  - Reliance on community generated resources
  - Informal management/administrative culture

- Result: pattern of unstable community organizations and networks

ACDPN Member Organizations

- Despite ACDPN membership requirements, development/formalization of member organization varied

  ◦ CDN BCA – Stable history, established board, endowment, full time staff

  ◦ NDG BCA – Rebuilding after cuts to Centre-aide funding, minimal staff & finances

  ◦ LaSalle BCA– Developing organization, volunteer run, no budget independent of SFP

  ◦ Little Burgundy – Collapsed in process of formalization

  ◦ WIBCA – Stable but reliant on voluntary efforts & contributions

Complex Relationship Between Development & Prevention Programming

- More developed organizations were better able to support program implementation
  - Resources required for recruitment/retention of participants
  - Unexpected issues normal part of program implementation

- Resource shortages at network and organizational level slowed the pace of network development
  - catch 22
    - Network development ➡ formalization of member organizations
    - Organizational development needed before network can formalize

- Necessitates a complex role for CDN BCA
  - Network member
  - Mentor for other agencies
  - Sponsor for ACDPN
  - Negotiating roles depends on informal social capital within network

Supporting Simultaneous Community Development & Prevention Programming

- Funding organizations, as well as projects

- Implementation time frames that allow for multiple levels of development work (network, organization)

- Development of formal mechanisms for moving from pilot project to long-term institutionalization

- Emphasis on community, in addition to family/individual, outcomes

- Recognition of bridging social capital role of evaluation

Contact Information

vandna.sinha@mcgill.ca

anne-marie.piche@mcgill.ca