Description

Research Objectivity

The assumed purity of scientific research is thought to lie in the objectivity of the researcher, observing and recording behaviors and results with all available precautions in place to avoid any suggestion of conflict of interest or bias. Results generated in this manner are assumed to be representative of a broader population, and depending on the chosen methodology, generalizations or statistical extrapolations can be made to further develop our knowledge of the phenomenon being studied.

However, in fields such as healthcare and education, this objective approach hasn't always proven to be the most effective methodology for the research participants who are directly impacted by whatever action is taken in response to the results generated by the research.

Community-Based Participatory Research

Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) takes a different approach by involving the community as research study partners rather than just test subjects. By encouraging the community to participate fully in all aspects of the study, the researchers are able to access a comprehensive profile of the issues affecting that community and to seek their direct feedback on any proposed solutions to those issues within the research cycle, rather than the traditional model of proposing hypotheses based on a literature review.

Involvement Equates to Ownership

In healthcare and education research especially, if the issues are community based, why shouldn't the community take an active role in fixing them? Often, community research projects will propose solutions based on the limits of the collected data, but then the researchers depart before those proposed solutions are implemented. In that scenario, the community has no ownership of those solutions and residents are not invested in their success. However, this high level of involvement isn't achieved without overcoming some obstacles:

- ***Trust*** – a general announcement at the local community center of an upcoming research project is unlikely to get residents lining up for a chance to participate. Arriving out of the blue is likely to engender skepticism that will take time to overcome. Answering any and all questions in detail will be a good start but concern over what information is being collected and what you intend to do with it will take time to address.
- ***Incentives*** – funds for the research project may well include additional resources for the community, but potential study participants may take a singular perspective—what's in it for me—before deciding whether or not to get involved. This does not automatically equate to gifts or expense reimbursement—the chance to help the community in which they live may prove to be incentive enough.
- ***Skills*** – the residents may be completely aware of the problems in their community and still not

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have the skill set to plan a way to address them. Direct involvement in studying the issues in more detail may require skills training in implementing the solutions that the study results propose.
- ***Ongoing Support*** – the key to successful CBPR initiatives lies in development of a long-term collaboration that includes ongoing support during the implementation of the proposed solutions.

On Paper vs. On Ground

CBPR studies are easier to document than to implement. The logic of the approach is solid, but the mechanics of such implementations can be challenging because so much of traditional research methodology has to be put aside if the initiative has any chance of success. Research expertise must balance community knowledge, and for the partnership to be equitable, resources, results, obstacles, and credit must be shared equally.

Category

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