

A Critical Analysis of Community Based Substance Use Interventions in Refugee and Immigrant Populations



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Background

Population and Substance Use

- High rates of problematic substance use in refugee populations
- High substance availability in refugee camps contributes to misuse
- Complicated by cultural beliefs and limited interventions

Prior Research and CBPR

- Prior research by CUSOM students via community-based participatory research
- Identified culturally sensitive education intervention to address alcohol misuse, reflecting community concern about issue

Methods

- **Study Setup:** Approved by the institutional review board, the study aimed to conduct focus groups and alcohol health seminars in a partner community.
- **Preliminary Efforts:** Researchers interviewed community members and leaders, and attempted community events and outreach over 36 months.
- **Challenges Faced:** Minimal participant enrollment and engagement hindered the study's aims.
- **Identified Barriers:** Themes aligning with published considerations in similar communities emerged, including substance use (especially alcohol) among displaced refugees and Myanmar or Burmese populations.

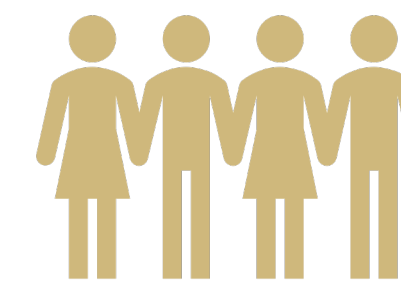
Results

Community contact history



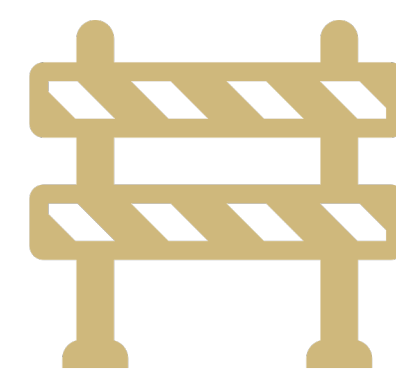
- Over 36 months, researchers made attempts to engage with community and community members:
 - Community events, including school supply drives, vaccination clinics, game nights
 - Participant recruitment events, with meals provided and in-person interpretation
 - Distributed materials about project, including flyers, posters, newsletters
 - Virtual events
- Majority of community outreach occurred in partnership with refugee housing complex

Barriers to engagement with CBPR methodologies



- Barriers identified in literature² and evident in this study include community definition, community representation, and mutual commitment of and benefit to community and researcher
- Partnership with housing complex resulted in narrow audience
- Small number of participants were unlikely to be representative of larger community
- Intended benefit of study to population not adequately conveyed
- Additional situational barriers were contributory to inadequate engagement

Barriers to engagement with substance use programs



- Many barriers to substance use prevention/treatment have been identified in literature¹
- Barriers to engagement with target population of study included:
 - Stigma surrounding alcohol use and its discussion, lack of guidance in culturally-appropriate approach to topic
 - Language barriers and inadequate interpretation
 - Gender differences
 - Closed community

Future recommendations for community engagement



- Recommendation for successful engagement with communities via CBPR methodologies have been identified in literature³
- Most important recommendation for future work on this study is to understand complexity of community
- Sufficient relationship-building did not occur
- Additional time and resources should be spent in establishing trusting relationship with community
- Future researchers should aim to develop relationships with individuals to advise on culture, best practices, and stigmatized topic

Conclusions

- Stigma, language barriers, gender differences, and difficulties connecting with community leaders hindered participation.
- CBPR barriers included difficulty in identifying and engaging the target community due to resource limitations and uncertainty.
- Situational barriers included COVID-19, community member relocation, loss of a community member, and high staff turnover.
- Future research should prioritize understanding community complexities, building trust, engaging community members for cultural insights, and tailoring communication.

Implications

- CBPR seeks to progress population research to a new equitable standard.
- Barriers between participants and researchers are particularly evident around topics such as substance use, which carry more stigma in certain populations.
- When engaging in CBPR, researchers should investigate known barriers to best serve the community and investigate research questions ethically.

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