PhotoVoice: A Community-Based Participatory Approach in Developing Disaster Reduction Strategies

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What Is the Purpose of This Study?

- Partnering with a vulnerable, at-risk community to conduct a vulnerability and capability assessment, gap analysis, and strategy development utilizing PhotoVoice and the core principles of community-based participatory research (CBPR) with a goal of strengthening community capacity to respond to tsunami.

What Is the Problem?

- Growing population densities, deforestation, and the degradation of natural buffers have contributed significantly to the increased risk of damage from natural disaster.

- Communities may be isolated and on their own for days or weeks after a natural disaster. For example, after a natural disaster in Japan, one community was isolated for 12 days before help arrived.

- Traditional disaster preparedness and mitigation approaches often are "top down" and fail to consider the specific needs, resources, and capacities of a community.

- Community members are increasingly frustrated and disenfranchised by being excluded from planning and decision making in disaster preparedness and mitigation.

- Using CBPR can help communities to increase awareness and skills in disaster preparedness and mitigation, but literature in this area is limited.

- PhotoVoice, a CBPR tool, has been used successfully to assist communities in conducting contextually appropriate assessments, but its use in disaster reduction and preparedness is still very limited.

What Are the Findings?

- PhotoVoice was found to be a successful CBPR process to assist a vulnerable community to develop contextually appropriate disaster-reduction strategies for a future tsunami.

- Forty-two vulnerabilities and 50 capabilities within the community were identified and then categorized through photo presentations and discussion sessions.

- The photographs and reflective data provided individual residents and the community with greater insight into their vulnerabilities, capabilities, and gaps, and offered participating outsiders a unique opportunity to see the community through local eyes.

- Thirteen gaps were identified and discussed, yielding 16 feasible strategies to reduce the community's vulnerability to tsunami.

- The community strengthened its capacity to reduce vulnerability and respond to a tsunami and to replicate the use of PhotoVoice in planning for other disasters.

Who Should Care Most?

- Residents of communities vulnerable to natural disasters.
- Community leaders within those vulnerable communities.
- County, state, and federal government officials.

Recommendations for Action

- Consider using PhotoVoice as a community-based participatory approach to increase individual and community awareness of their gaps and capabilities related to disaster and to develop contextually appropriate strategies to increase response and resilience.
- Integrate external disaster-specific subject matter experts into the PhotoVoice sessions to share best practices.
- Provide funding for the implementation of the disaster reduction strategies developed.
- Consider evaluating the disaster-reduction strategies through a community-led disaster exercise.