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Title

Conducting a Community Assessment and Accompanying Power Analysis

Overview and Duration

This introduction to macro practice in communities spans two three-hour class periods. The module introduces students to a theoretical conceptualization and practical application of a community needs assessment. The community needs assessment activity itself is based on Kirst-Ashmann & Hull's (2015) notion of community as context, target, and mechanism for change. More specifically, through an interactive, experiential exercise, students will envision their place as change agents in a community (context), acknowledge what needs to be changed in a community of need (target), and recognize the present and emergent resources that can assist a community in "solving its own problems" (mechanism of change)

Concomitant with a basic understanding of community needs assessment is a power analysis. It is critical for beginning students to begin to understand how power operates within communities. In this portion of the curriculum, the difference between potential and actual power will be emphasized. In addition, students will recognize sources of power and how they can both contribute to and counteract conflict that is inevitable. In the culmination of the activity, students will be given the opportunity to use power analysis to assist in a mock community's mechanism of change. Each part contains an all-class debriefing time, which will serve as the evaluation component of the material.

Learning Objectives

Students will by the end of this unit be able to:

- describe the importance of communities from a macro perspective.
- define "community."
- list 5 common functions of communities.
- understand the purpose of a community needs assessment.
- be familiar with categories used for a community needs assessment.
- conduct a mock community needs assessment.
- define power as it relates to communities
- distinguish between positive, negative, and potential power.
- differentiate between elitist, pluralist, and amorphous community structures.
- apply concepts of power theory to their community assessment activities.

Target Social Work Course

Intro to macro practice or basic policy development courses on the BSW or MSW foundational level

Detailed Description of the Activities and Exercises, Including Debriefing Points and Assessments

Explanatory Material Pre-Activity (# 1)

- I. The role of social workers in neighborhoods and communities: Intro to community assessments
 - A. Brief justification: Why care about communities?
 1. As a social worker, you may not think of the community as a client, but it is on equal par with an individual.
 2. Elicit a client with whom someone is working. How is the community a stakeholder in that person's treatment plan?
 3. The question is: Will you just ignore it and help your client adapt to that gap or need or will you treat the community as a client and serve both in the process?
 - B. Perspectives on the Community
 1. Community as **context** (We practice in a time and place and space and this influences how we work. The community influences what services we provide and what problems we address or ignore.)
 2. Community as **target** (The community is the object of our change efforts; it is what we are seeking to change; lots of ways to do that: improving services, adding services, working to reduce social ills, etc.)
 3. Community as **mechanism** for change (The community can solve its own problems by drawing upon the talents and interests of community members.)
 - C. Transition: To do community work, we begin with completing a community assessment. Generalist practitioners who work on the community level:
 1. Assess needs.
 2. Suggest new programs or projects.
 3. Advocate for change so that these new programs or projects can be implemented.
 4. Use the community as client in doing all of the above.
- II. Defining our terms
 - A. Students write down the name of the community in which they reside or have resided (know the best).
 - B. Note three perspectives of community: spatial, social, and political. We will focus on the first.

- C. Warner's 5 community functions, as an introduction to community assessment activity:
1. Socialization (the transmission of values, culture, beliefs, and norms to community members)
 2. The production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services (including housing, food, ect.)
 3. Social control (setting limits on behavior by creating and enforcing laws via police and other official bodies)
 4. Mutual support (community members taking care of one another via informal actions)
 5. Participation of residents (residents having the opportunities to interact with others via recreation, talking, church-going, and other forms of socializing)
- D. As social workers, we ultimately want to know which of these functions are being played out and which are not, so as to determine community strengths and liabilities.

Activity (#1)

- III. Conducting a community needs assessment, Part 1
- A. Enlist 4-5 "community experts" who know about the community they wrote down very well in II A above.
 - B. Have other students self-select to work with these students (4-5 in a group).
 - C. Student groups work together to create a drawing of the chosen community. In the visual depiction, students represent the primary character of the community more than a mere geographic map (what distinguishes it, makes it unique, as opposed to a faithful depiction of it). Creativity counts!
 - D. Hand out student prep sheet (Appendix A). Groups create the visual depiction of the community based on the information indicated in prep sheet.
- IV. Conducting a community needs assessment, Part 2
- A. Student community experts stay with their drawings.
 - B. Others, on cue, move to another drawing. Experts share information with other group members. Visitors ask questions based on Appendix B "Questions for Consideration" resource.
 - C. Experts add elements to their drawing based on their discussions.
 - D. Repeat process two more times, with students moving to other drawings after a designated time.
- V. Follow-up/Debriefing of community needs assessment
- A. Students return to their original groups. Experts "clue in" rest of group members any changes made on diagrams/what the flavors of the discussions were.

- B. Student groups deliberate on the following:
1. *Name the two most pressing problems/needs in the community.*
 2. *What are two recommendations you would make for community leaders to address these needs (based on your assessment)?*

Assessment (Part 1)

- C. Call back large group: Have groups answer their questions in front of class. Debrief/discuss, as necessary.

- VI. Summary/Transition to next section/topic
Emphasize the importance of knowing who is and who isn't in power—who has a voice and who doesn't—as a means of assessing the possibility of community change, which can then lead to effective community intervention. Next we will conduct a power analysis of the communities.

Explanatory Material Pre-Activity (# 2)

- VII. Follow-Up to Community Assessment activity: Power analysis
- A. Defining power (Source: Kirst-Ashman & Hull)
1. the ability to move people on a chosen course or achieve some goal (positive power)
 2. the ability to prevent someone from doing something he or she wants to do (negative power)
 3. power that has yet to be exercised/utilized (potential power)
 4. Negative power is more difficult to detect, as it is usually hidden or behind the scenes. Negative power can be institutionalized or so much ingrained in a community that it prevents any change from happening (e.g., the case of a powerful business that “runs the community”)
 5. It takes effort to convince a social unit or agency to engage in a positive power shift
 6. Sometimes a victory can be won if an influence can be convinced NOT to wield its power
 7. Potential power is that which macro practitioners can tap into, as with identifying allies and creating a strategy
 8. One more distinction to make: formal vs. informal power
 - a. Formal power is determined by one's position: hierarchical, a vertical chain of command
 - b. Informal power is based not on position, but on access to formal power brokers and decision makers; these individuals may be hidden or not obvious, but might have power because of their knowledge or the potential they have for impacting those in formal positions (individuals working in the media, for e.g.—the firings in Ferguson, MO; the NPR series "Serial" is a good example as well)

- c. Another way to think about it is "Who really has the power in a community or organization?" It may not always be obvious.
- B. Quick Application: Elicit some thoughts from the group: Who has the most power in their field placement agencies? Are there instances of agencies where the formal power structure is more "powerless" than "powerful"?
- C. Structures of power: Who has power and how is it proportioned? (Source: Meenaghan, Gibbons, and McNutt)
1. Elitists = disproportionate power resides in the hands of a few key people (*reputation* determines power)
 - a. Usually have money and status (high social standing)
 - b. Tend to make the key policy decisions in the community (or have ability to influence those who do)
 - c. Can also be overt economic, educational, and religious leaders who publicly display their power (Detroit ministers, for example, who hold more power than the city council or mayor)
 - d. Elites tend not to be defined by their positions or professions, but generally are associated with wealth and name. In this way there is a great divide between the "common people" and the leaders; they tend to not know "what's really going on" with the people because they really don't have to
 - e. Elites tend to stay out of publicity/media.
 - f. Elites tend to be more active on issues that directly affect their own interests/causes (exception might be Warren Buffet); however, they tend to be more conservative in their use of power—it is important to keep the "status quo"
 2. Pluralists = not totally different in approach to power, but several different people have power; if they come together, it is because the issues they care about come into sync
 - a. Power is distributed broadly among a variety of constituencies: industry/business, government, and the professional world. No one sector clearly dominates over another.
 - b. Power is established in occupation, profession, and organizational affiliation, not in status or wealth (e.g. the school superintendent has a tremendous amount of power, but usually only within the school district he/she serves; education is his/her focus/expertise)
 - c. Pluralist leaders are more public and open about their efforts; they may use the political process or city councils to get change done. As a result, they may get attention/media for doing so. They include more people in their decision making and actions.

- d. These leaders also tend to be held more accountable by the public, especially when they do something wrong
 - e. There is more opportunity for coalitions/collaborations to occur in this scenario, as different groups bargain with one another to get what they want—not always in an unethical manner.
 - f. Issues tend to be more important than wealth; therefore, this sort of community tends to be favored by social workers
3. Amorphous communities = no persistent pattern in the way power is shared in the community (rather, a *cause or idea* drives who has the power at any given time)
- a. Not meant to be a “cop out,” but actually a sign of problem/tension in a community
 - b. Power is unknown or hidden or not static: power shifts with the loudest voice or the issue of the day.
 - c. One sign of an amorphous community is when long-term residents try to protect their turf because they perceive that someone is taking away their traditions, beliefs, or values
 - d. Often social problems or issues drive the decision about who is most powerful (e.g., many small communities experiencing resistance to immigrant populations; any examples?
 - e. Social workers have the best opportunity to make change in these communities, although the change is slow and comes at a cost at times (social workers get involved because of some identified need; they might become part of the power structures)
4. Quick Application
How is power proportioned in the communities represented in our community assessment activity? (Show a poster or two from Activity #1.)

Activity (# 2)

- VIII. Conduct Community Power Simulation activity.
See Appendix B (Exercise #11, Recognizing Sources of Community Power and Influence; Source: Sheafor & Horejsi)

Assessment (Part 2)

- IX. Debrief afterwards:
- A. Who had the power? What kind of power was it?
 - B. Who didn't have the power? Why not?
 - C. Was this an elitist, pluralist, or amorphous community? How do you know?

- D. How true to life was this experience? Does power play out in communities in this fashion?
- E. What did you learn about yourself (and your use of power) from this role-play?

References Cited

- Meenaghan, T., Gibbons, E., & McNutt, J. (2004). *Generalist Practice in Larger Settings: Knowledge and Skills Concepts*. (2nd Ed.). New York: Lyceum.
- Kirst-Ashman, K., & Hull, G. (2015). *Generalist Practice with Organizations and Communities* (6th Ed.). Stamford, CT: Cengage.
- Sheafor, B., & Horejsi, C. (2008). *Instructor's Manual and Test Bank for Techniques and Guidelines for Social Work Practice*. (8th Ed.). Boston: Pearson.

Appendix A: Community Assessment Categories/Questions

MAKE SURE EACH OF THE FOLLOWING IS ADDRESSED SOMEWHERE ON YOUR DRAWING.

1. Type and function: *small city, small town, rural, bedroom, institutional?*
2. Ethnic composition: *equal or one population that dominates?*
3. Community spatial/structural boundaries: *Where are the obvious divisions, both geographic and psychological? Is the community divided or diffuse racially, SES-wise, etc.*
4. Resource systems: *What are they--informal, formal, societal? Where are they located?*
5. Economic systems: *Who is in control of the money? Is it "above ground" or "underground"? Specific businesses that impact the economic system? Are there more "home-grown" businesses or larger conglomerates?*
6. Political systems: *Who are the powerful people/institutions politically? Are these formal, informal? What laws/policies are most influential?*
7. What else is important to add that describes the flavor of this community?

Appendix B: Questions for Consideration for Community Assessment Activity

1. How do internal boundaries (both physical and psychological) impact the community?
2. What types of external stressors influence community well-being? What has been the community's response to these stressors in general?
3. Which individuals, groups, or organizations are most powerful in this community? How do they assert their power? What impact does this power have on those with little power in the community?
4. Which groups or populations are marginalized in the community? What evidence do you have of this fact? What has been the community leaders' response and/or attitude towards this marginalization?
5. Are there any big events or occurrences that have happened internally or externally that have influenced the functioning of this community? If so, how has the community tried to adapt to the effects of these occurrences?
6. Which issues or needs in the community produce competition? Who are the key players in this competition? What is the source of this competition? Who is "winning" and "losing"?
7. Has gentrification (or a version of it) taken place in the community? Who has invaded whom? What has been the effect of this process on the community?
8. Are there concentrated areas of the community that signify segregation? What factors make the community segregated, if so? (race, class, etc.) What has been the effect of this segregation on the community?
9. Which of the 3 community resources—informal, formal, or societal—are utilized by most community residents? Who, if anybody, "falls through the cracks" in terms of access to these resources?
10. What impact do state or county laws have on the community? Are there policies that are prohibitive to citizens? What are they?
11. What challenges and strengths exist about this community because of its size?
12. How the community's economic system advanced or limited the well-being of its residents?
13. How powerful are the community's formal political systems (city council, mayor, etc.)? Who has power that is not part of these formal political systems?

Appendix C: Exercise #11, Recognizing Sources of Community Power and Influence

See Next Page

Exercise #11. Recognizing Sources of Community Power and Influence

The possibility of influencing community decisions is often well beyond the experience of most students. Yet, the mission of social work and the development of human services programs requires that social work graduates are prepared for social action efforts that affect community change. Such change requires that students know how to assess and influence the decision making structures in their communities.

Background Reading:

- Models for Changing Communities (Chapter 6)
- Learning About Your Community (10.13)
- Community Decision-Making Analysis (11.23)
- Planning a Primary Prevention Program (12.14)
- Class Advocacy (13.33)
- Influencing Legislators and Other Decision Makers (13.40)

Class Assignment:

This exercise is a community power simulation. The purpose is to help students experience the importance of pooling resources (i.e., power) in order to accomplish goals that involve community change. Some people in a community are far more influential than others and, therefore, it takes an accumulation of other resources to offset such concentration of power.

The simulation requires a minimum of two hours. Poker chips are used to represent influence. If there are about 20 students, support for an "adequate" program should require 100 chips and an "inadequate" program should require 60 chips (see Rule #3 below).

Prior to beginning the simulation, the instructor must prepare an envelope for each role (participant). Included in the envelope is the role name tag and the number of poker chips assigned to the role. A role name tag should display both the role (e.g., physician) and the number of power chips that person possesses. The instructor should also prepare a 8" x 11" name card for each of the 17 proposals being considered (see Rule #2 below) and designate one participant to serve as advocate for that program.

Last minute adjustments in the number of players can best be made by adding or subtracting from the roles with very little power.

COMMUNITY POWER SIMULATION

Goal: Determine which proposed programs will be addressed.

Basic Rules

1. The people of a community have the capacity to make changes and create programs. Discuss each of the proposals having the advocate present a brief case for the proposed program. A poker chip is a measure of power and influence in the community. The "voting" of a chip is the use of power to oppose or support a proposal (see list of 17 proposals).
2. Chips can be voted "for" or "against" a proposed program or not voted at all. To vote "for" -- place chip on the proposal's name card; to vote "against" -- place chip in front of proposal's name card. Each participant must vote all of his or her chips.
3. The number of voted chips required to create an adequate program in the community is _____. The number of chips required to create a program of inadequate size and quality is _____.
4. Voting occurs between _____ and _____ on _____. Once a chip has been "voted," it cannot be moved or transferred to another proposal.
5. No one can leave the room between _____ and _____.
6. The simulation's role tags must be worn at all times.

<u>ROLE</u>	<u>POWER</u> (number of chips)
1. poor person (Native American)	2
2. poor person (elderly white)	2
3. militant/radical	1
4. owner of three gas stations	5
5. wealthy retired business person	8
6. community organizer and activist	3
7. school superintendent (public school)	10
8. attorney (private practice)	20
9. president, Chamber of Commerce	15
10. Protestant minister (conservative)	15
11. physician (private practice)	20
12. owner of department store	25
13. mayor of city (elected to 3rd term)	25
14. owner of construction company	25
14. banker, focused on economic development	25
15. newspaper editor	30
17. county commissioner	30
18. state legislator	30
20. homeless person (alcoholic, mentally ill)	1
21. juvenile delinquent	1

Proposed Programs (no other options or proposals are allowed)

1. Native American Center (provide social services, recreation, cultural activities for Native Americans).
2. Family and Children's Services (provide marriage and family counseling, family support services, day care, emergency foster care, adoption).
3. Substance Abuse Program (provide halfway house, detoxification, rehabilitation center, outreach and education related to alcohol and drug abuse).
4. Services to Developmentally Disabled (provide job training for mentally retarded, respite care for parents, sheltered employment, group homes).
5. Youth Golf Program (create 9-hole golf course, especially for youth).
6. Legal Services for the Poor (free or low cost legal assistance for persons who are poor).
7. Health Care Services for Poor (free or low cost medical and other health care for persons who are poor).
8. Planned Parenthood and Abortion Service (provide family planning, contraception, counseling and abortion).
9. Senior Citizen's Program (provide outreach, transportation, home delivered meals, and recreation for elderly persons).
10. Tourist Attraction Program (create program to attract visitors and tourists to community in order to stimulate local economy).
11. Program to Give Recognition to Outstanding Youth in Community (give recognition, scholarships, etc. to good students, student leaders, and trouble-free youth).
12. Program to Prevent Shoplifting. (additional assistance to police and businesses to prevent theft and shoplifting from local businesses).
13. City Band Program (development of city band and promotion of band concerts).
14. Downtown Convention Center (develop and improve facilities for conferences, auditorium for concerts and sporting events).
15. Mental Health Program (provide community-based care and treatment for persons who have a mental or emotional disorder and related problems).
16. Pollution Reduction Program (reduction of air, water, noise pollution).
17. Program to conduct grassroots organization of persons who are poor and disadvantaged (develop political power, advocate for social reform and jobs for poor).