

INCREASING SOCIAL CAPITAL AND PERSONAL EFFICACY THROUGH SMALL-SCALE COMMUNITY EVENTS

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California's voter-approved Children and Families Act of 1998 calls for money collected from tobacco taxes to support services for families with children up to 5 years of age. Sacramento County uses a portion of its allocation for small community grants with the specific intent of building social capital among neighbors and across communities. The evaluation of the 995 Community Building Initiative (CBI) events funded from July 2007 to June 2010 included randomly selecting parents from a larger population ($n = 29,607$). Structured interviews with 538 parents identified those who had attended community events within the last 6 months and assessed hypothesized outcomes. Attending any community event was related to increased measures of social capital. However, those participating in a CBI event demonstrated the highest levels of familiarity with neighbors, neighborhood cohesion, and efficacy, as revealed through generalized linear mixed model analyses controlling for race/ethnicity, primary language, and education. © 2011 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

The construct *social capital* has been operationalized as social relationships or networks (Giordano & Lindstrom, 2010; Moore, Shiell, Hawe, & Haines, 2005) and trust of others (Giordano & Lindstrom, 2010; Hamano et al., 2010; Kennedy, Kawachi,

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Prothrow-Stith, Lochner, & Gupta, 1998), often at the neighborhood or state level of analysis. Social capital has been linked to a number of health outcomes, including self-rated health status (Giordano & Lindstrom, 2010; Kawachi, Kennedy, & Glass, 1999; Linden-Bostrom, Persson, & Eriksson, 2010), improved mental health (Hamano et al., 2010), and mortality (Kennedy, Kawachi, Lochner, & Prothrow-Stith, 1997). A strong relationship has also been found at the ecological level between low social capital and firearm homicide (Kennedy et al., 1998). Few studies have implemented and investigated interventions to increase social capital among populations in need (Dominguez & Arford, 2010).

In 1998, California voters approved a tax on all tobacco products sold in the state to support programs to benefit young children and their families. The First 5 Sacramento Commission uses a portion of its allocated funds for grants to groups of friends and neighbors to plan and implement Community Building Initiative (CBI) events. First 5 Sacramento Commission staff publicize the availability of CBI grants and provide technical assistance in developing applications to interested community groups. Grants of up to \$5,000 are awarded through a competitive process and First 5 Sacramento Commission staff provides oversight to ensure that funded events meet program objectives. The specific intent of the CBI is to create new relationships and increase trust among neighbors and across communities, and thus promote social capital.

METHOD

The evaluation of the CBI was guided by the four specific indicators established a priori to program implementation by the First 5 Sacramento Commission. Measures of community connectedness, neighborhood cohesion, utilization of community resources, and efficacy, as well as history of attendance at community events, were assessed through a longitudinal survey conducted from March 2008 to June 2010.

Procedures

Families receiving First 5 Sacramento services during the 3-year period ($n = 29,607$) were recruited for the evaluation by contractors providing services in the areas of lactation support, effective parenting, early childhood education (i.e., “school readiness”), and the provision of comprehensive health insurance for children up to 5 years of age. Seven hundred twenty-five families were randomly sampled from a centralized web-based system that included parent contact information and family demographics. Five hundred thirty-eight parents were recruited and interviewed in English, Hmong, Russian, Spanish, Ukrainian, or Vietnamese by trained interviewers. Based on parents’ preference, interviews occurred in face-to-face settings where the parents lived or at a public location (70.6% of interviews), or over the phone.

Participants

Just under half (48.5%) of survey participants were Latino, and 61.2% spoke English. Of the 1,186 interviews, 44.4% were in Spanish and 6.8% were conducted in a language other than English or Spanish.

Twenty-six percent of families did not have a parent who graduated from high school, and high school or equivalent was the highest level of education for 34.6% of families. Employment was also assessed at the family level: Over half of households

(55.8%) had at least one parent working fulltime and 21.7% of families were unemployed. Among families out of work, 41.0% included at least one parent seeking employment. Thus, roughly one-in-10 families were unemployed and looking for work.

Survey Instrument and Measures

The survey instrument included items to assess a number of outcomes related to First 5 Sacramento services, such as breastfeeding duration and access to health services, as well as those hypothesized to be related to CBI: Community connectedness, neighborhood cohesion, utilization of community resources, and efficacy.

Community connectedness was assessed by three items related to parents' social networks. Specifically, parents were asked to report the number of people in their neighborhood who they knew by name, the number of people who they visit with in each other's home, and the number of relatives or friends who live in their neighborhood.

Parents were also presented with nine items from the Neighborhood Environment for Children Rating Scale (Coulton, Korbin, & Su, 1996) and the Social Cohesion Scale (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997). Levels of agreement with each item, such as "My neighborhood is a good place to raise children" and "People in my neighborhood can be trusted," were combined to represent neighborhood cohesion.

For utilization of community resources, parents were asked "are you or anyone in your household" receiving 12 different types of community resources. The list included resources to address current needs (e.g., food, income, utility bill assistance; prenatal care; legal services; respite child care) and those to potentially increase economic capital (e.g., job training, English as a second language classes, family literacy classes).

Finally, efficacy, as assessed by the Pearlin Mastery Scale (Pearlin, Lieberman, Menaghan, & Mullan, 1981), investigated the degree to which parents perceived they had control over their lives; for example, "I have little control over the things that happen to me" and "I often feel helpless in dealing with the problems of life."

Attendees of CBI events rarely know that the event is sponsored by the First 5 Sacramento Commission. Thus, assessing attendance could not be achieved by asking survey participants if they had recently been to a CBI event. We addressed this challenge by including in the interview instrument general descriptions of six types of CBI events (Table 1).

Field interviewers read each description and asked parents if they had attended an event "like this" in the past 6 months. Follow-up questions pertained to the name and

Table 1. Types of Community Building Initiative (CBI) Events Sponsored by the First 5 Sacramento Commission

Events that promote a safe neighborhood, such as crime or drug prevention events with local police, or Neighborhood Watch groups or block club meetings
Events that help parents become better parents, such as parent education classes, discussion and support groups, or community resource awareness meetings for parents
Events that encourage literacy and early childhood education, through such activities as neighborhood book clubs, reading programs, or library hours for children
Celebrations and festivals such as neighborhood celebrations, holiday festivals, cultural events, pot-luck dinners, or barbeques
Events that promote children's creativity, such as with arts and crafts, dance, or music
Events that promote nutrition, health, and fitness, such as community bike rides for children, health fairs, or community gardens to teach children nutrition

the (estimated) date and location of each event. These responses were compared with a master list of CBI events. Two coders, who had demonstrated reliability $>80\%$ on a sample of data, coded the likelihood that each parent-reported event was an actual CBI event. Parents were then placed into one of three categories for each survey period. Our hypothesis was that measures of social capital would be lowest among those who did not attend a community event, followed by those who attended an event, with parents attending a CBI event reporting the highest levels of social capital.

Analyses

The hypotheses were tested using generalized linear mixed model analyses controlling for respondent's race/ethnicity (Latino vs. Other) primary language (English vs. Other) as factors, and highest level of parent education as a covariate. We conducted post hoc pairwise comparisons of the model-predicted means using the estimated marginal means procedure in SPSS, version 19.

RESULTS

Nine hundred ninety-five CBI events occurred over the 3-year period. Our sampling and measurement methodologies captured attendance for 100 CBI events.

The Cronbach's alpha for neighborhood cohesion was .78 and composite scores for the nine related items ranged from 2.5 to 9.5. Efficacy also achieved a high degree of reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .76$) with scores ranging from 1.7 to 4.0.

Attendees of CBI events reported the highest number of neighbors known by name and people who visit each other's homes, as well as greater levels of neighborhood cohesion and efficacy (Table 2). In addition, CBI-event attendees accessed significantly more community resources during the previous 6 months. Finally, significantly fewer friends and relatives lived in the neighborhoods of parents who had not participated in a community event.

Table 2. Social Capital Outcomes in Relation to Levels of Participation in Community Events

	<i>During previous 6 months</i>		
	<i>Did not attend a community event,</i> M (SE)	<i>Attended a community event, not CBI,</i> M (SE)	<i>Attended a CBI event,</i> M (SE)
<i>Community connectedness</i>			
No. people in neighborhood know by name	4.70 (.258) ^a	6.15 (.276) ^b	7.85 (.618) ^c
No. people who visit each other's homes	1.82 (.144) ^a	2.31 (.144) ^a	2.59 (.310) ^b
No. friends/relatives who live in neighborhood	1.91 (.179) ^a	2.23 (.179) ^b	3.23 (.384) ^b
Neighborhood cohesion score	6.25 (.044) ^a	6.47 (.047) ^b	6.72 (.104) ^c
No. of community resources utilized	1.49 (.055) ^a	1.73 (.059) ^a	1.87 (.130) ^b
Efficacy score	2.92 (.016) ^a	3.03 (.017) ^b	3.14 (.038) ^c

Note. CBI = First 5 Sacramento Commission-funded Community Building Initiative Event. Generalized linear mixed model analyses controlled for race/ethnicity, primary language, and family education. Means with different superscripts significantly differ ($p \leq .05$) by post hoc pairwise tests. Comparisons should be made horizontally.

DISCUSSION

We found positive relationships between CBI event attendance and higher levels of social capital among a population with limited education, employment, and English-speaking skills. This included an increased sense of trust of neighbors, which may have resulted from the new acquaintances and friendships developed from attending a CBI event.

Our findings also suggest that through CBI events, parents learn about and are empowered to access resources that can immediately and eventually improve their circumstances. Increased efficacy, or the extent to which one believes he or she can control life circumstances, among CBI event attendees may have been due to the information exchanged among parents and by invited speakers at CBI events. Increased knowledge from these information-exchange activities on how to more effectively deal with issues related to employment, transportation, the legal system, children's education, and housing certainly could empower individuals, especially those who did not grow up in the predominant culture.

Strengths of our study include the fact that field interviewers (and parents) were blinded to which survey participants had attended a CBI event. One major shortcoming of this study is time-order; it could be the case that those with increased social capital were more likely to attend CBI events.

Given these limitations, our findings suggest that community events connect individuals in ways that foster new relationships, advance trust among neighbors, and increase personal efficacy. Furthermore, our study provides evidence that CBI events, which are designed with a specific focus on establishing and maintaining relationships among individuals within and across communities, appear to have the greatest impact on promoting social capital. It would be interesting to examine in future studies whether increases in utilization of community resources and efficacy translate into improved self-sufficiency and other positive family outcomes.

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