Are All Community Coalitions Created Equal? Characteristics Of An Effective Coalition Model

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Introduction

The coalition model of prevention delivery system

- Coalitions have long been viewed as a more effective and efficient way to deliver prevention services at the community level.
- Government and philanthropic funders have promoted, and often required, the use of community coalitions.
- Despite its widespread and longstanding popularity, there has been almost no empirical evidence to support the added value of a coalition model.
- In the absence of such empirical support, prior research has been unable to comparatively assess various coalition models.
- The Communities That Care model has recently demonstrated effectiveness in a large national randomized trial and under natural (non-research) conditions in a state-wide implementation.

The Pennsylvania Context

- Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency promoted and supported CTC coalitions since 1994.
- Nearly 120 CTC coalitions formed from 1994-2001; approximately 80 currently functioning.
- Through CTC and non-CTC coalitions, PCCD has funded nearly 200 evidence-based programs.

Theorized Advantages of Coalitions

- Community coalitions can serve as a proxy prevention system, increasing community readiness for adoption and implementation.
- Coordinating and delivering evidence-based program through a community coalition has the potential to improve implementation quality and community-level public health outcomes.
- Greater community connections may also increase and diversify program support and the likelihood of sustainability.

Methods

A TEST-BED FOR TYPE 2 TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

- In 2001, PCCD formed a partnership with Penn State’s Prevention Research Center (PRC) to provide technical assistance to grantees and study the process of program dissemination, leading to the creation of the Evidence-based Prevention and Intervention Support Center (EPISCenter) in 2008.
- Through annual surveys, the PRC collects data on program planning, implementation, barriers & assets, outcome measurement, and technical assistance needs.

PARTICIPANTS

- 146 representatives from organizations implementing EBPs associated with some form of coalition completed surveys.
- 63% of respondents reported being affiliated with a CTC coalition.
- Programs delivered by the respondents’ organizations can be classified in four groups:
  - Classroom (e.g. Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies)
  - Community/Mentoring (e.g. Big Brothers Big Sisters)
  - Family Prevention (e.g. Strengthening Families)
  - Family Treatment (e.g. Multi-systemic Therapy).

MEASURES

- Four scales assessed the characteristics of coalitions and their support for program sustainability:
  - Coalition Connection ($\alpha = .89$) – Assessed the strength of the program’s connection to the coalition.
  - Coalition Functioning ($\alpha = .83$) – Assessed the program’s perception of coalition functioning.
  - Coalition Instrumental Support ($\alpha = .84$) – Assessed the extent to which the coalition provided instrumental support for the functioning of the program.
  - Coalition Financial Support ($\alpha = .83$) – Assessed the extent to which the coalition provided financial support for the program.
- Sustainability was assessed for programs that had been off of PCCD funding for at least 2 years.
- Four response categories assessed the level at which the program was still functioning.

Results

Research Question 1: Do programs associated with CTC coalitions report better coalition functioning and support than those associated with non-CTC coalitions?

- Compared to affiliation with non-CTC coalitions, organizations affiliated with a CTC coalition were more likely to:
  - Have better coalition connections ($p < .05$).
  - Have better coalition functioning ($p < .05$).
  - Have better coalition instrumental support ($p < .05$).
  - Have better coalition financial support ($p < .05$).

Research Question 2: Do different types of EBPs experience different advantages from CTC coalitions?

- Programs connected to a CTC coalition reported higher levels of coalition connection, coalition functioning, coalition instrumental support and coalition financial support.
- Coalition effectiveness was only related to sustainability for community / mentoring programs.
- Coalition effectiveness was not related to sustainability for classroom, family prevention or family treatment programs.

Conclusions & Future Directions

- Programs connected to a CTC coalition reported higher levels of coalition connection, coalition functioning, coalition instrumental support and coalition financial support.
- Coalition effectiveness was only related to sustainability for community / mentoring programs; more research should examine differences by program type.
- Future research will explore the full mediation model, whereby membership to a CTC coalition is hypothesized to impact implementation quality and sustainability through characteristics associated with being an effective coalition.