

Community Coalitions for the prevention and articulated response to Child & Youth Abuse and Neglect: A multi-method study

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Abstract

Study Context

Results

Coalitions are privileged endeavors to activate social resources and address problems that a single organization, service or group cannot autonomously solve or overcome. With this proposal we aim to present a multi-method study to explore tensions and complementarities of preventive efforts and the search for articulated response to child abuse and neglect. Key-Informant Interviews (N=33), were conducted in Portugal to presidents of local Commissions for the Protection of Children & Youth, probing to understand their priorities, the perceived levels of goal attainment, to document successful collaborative efforts, and identify preventive and articulated response at the community level.

Results indicate that though these coalitions are created by Law (147/99, Sept 1st), which provides a common set of procedures and aims, creates a pattern for organizational, procedural and result analysis, the achievements and actions have a high degree of variance determined by the location of the commissions (Urban/ Rural), by the length of time of operation, and perceived characteristics of leaders (members involvement/ conflict management).

We also concluded that when preventive efforts are implemented it is reported to be rather difficult to document or evaluate them, and the articulated response efforts aimed at concrete situations of child abuse and neglect, not only tend to be the main focus of these coalitions, but are often a deterrent factor of broader preventive or empowering efforts for children and youth.



Table 1. Coalitions Involved in the study
N= 33 Key Informants and N= 244 Coalition Members
Response Rate varied from 10 to 80%

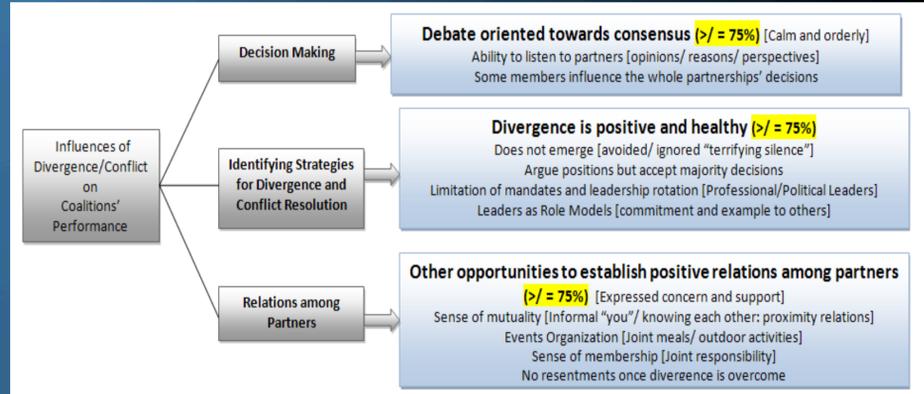


Table 4. Documenting Collaborative Efforts
N= 33 Key Informants Perspectives on how conflict affects
The first result for each domain was mentioned by 75% of more of the participants

Community Coalitions

Since the 80's and 90's, a vast number of publications documented partnerships and collaboration efforts in a myriad of community contexts ranging from micro-scale bailiwick or neighborhood initiatives to national and international endeavors.

The growing interest in the process and outcome of community coalitions is the result for the search for innovation to overcome the difficulties in implementing social policies, to facilitate citizen involvement, and a strategy to articulate services and articulate community response to serious and complex social problems (Chavis, 1995; Roussos & Fawcett 2000).

Coalitions are about the efforts to collaborate of individuals, groups, organizations or even communities (Wolf, 2010) that find a common interest, purpose or are able to articulate a set of common aims (Fawcett, Francisco, Paine-Andrews, Schultz, 2000), are a context for civic participation, and to pursue the growth and consolidation of healthier communities (Berkowitz, 2001). Coalitions and partnerships are a privileged vehicle to activate local resources and assets (Kretzman and McKnight, 1993) for problem resolution, and are action-oriented. Concerning the time frames for coalitions, it is possible to find different positions ranging from temporary, addressing very concrete and specific or sporadic issue (Barker, 2003) to structures organized to be sustainable in time Wolf, (idem), involving comprehensive community development.

Research suggests that coalitions play a relevant role in the encouragement of inter-organizational exchange, the development of integrated service systems (Foster-Fishman, Berkowitz, Lounsbury, Jacobson & Allen, 2001), and the improvement on communication among organizations in the community (Abbot, Jordan e Murtaza, 1995).

Traditionally, coalitions integrate key-stakeholders that may be individuals, organizations or groups affected or influenced by the issue around which it is organized; however currently and within the European context, there is a certain number of mandated or induced coalitions within public health, social welfare systems, and others that have specific mandates to organize formal networks, commissions, and an array of different bodies aiming the development of prevention or articulated response within local constituencies on issues as the protection of children and youth, the services and supports for the elderly, continuing care for chronic patients. Another catalyst for numerous partnerships have been, the European Programs for Social Cohesion implemented over the last 20 years, requiring national and transnational coalitions of groups, organizations and larger scale institutions such as Universities, Public Services of different areas to joint efforts into a common aim.

Participants

Key-Informants (N= 33)
79% were women
31% men.

In terms of age distribution 52% were in their 40's, 24% in their 50's and 20% in their 30's.

Instruments

Key-Informant Interview (Allen, 2005) a semi-structured interview guide translated into Portuguese (following standard procedures) and adapted to the Councils Studied, composed by 27 questions aiming to probe about the history, the procedural activities, aims, membership, and the kinds of interventions within the community.

Coalition Perceived Effectiveness Questionnaire (Allen, 2005), composed by 27 questions and a total of 112 items, probing for participants reasons for being a member, the kinds of activities they are involved in, and 5 sub-scales on: Decision-Making (11 items); Conflict Management (12 items); Leadership (14 items); Presence of Shared Mission (12 items); Results (18 items).

Strategy for Data Analysis

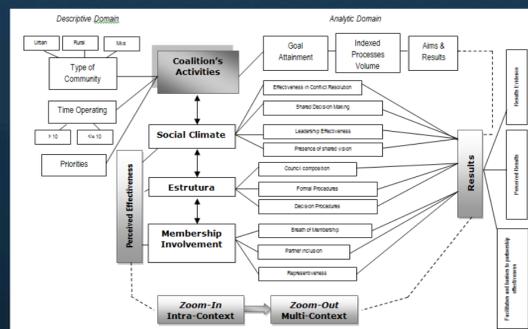


Table 2. Research Design & Strategy for Data Analysis

Results

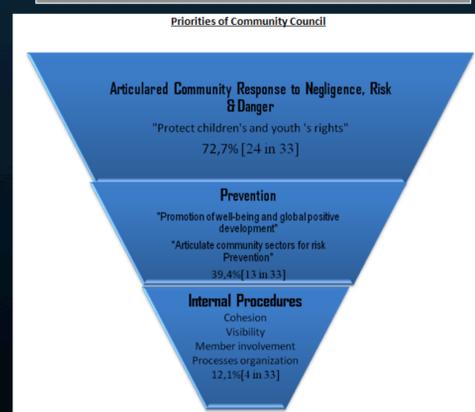


Table 3. Current Council Priority Reported by Leader

Volume of Reported Abuse & Neglect Situations indexed to Population aged 0-24

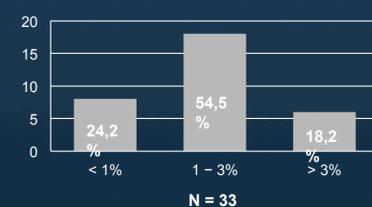


Table 6. Processes Volume/ Population
The data for Population aged 0-24 were are from the National Institute for Statistics (Portugal - www.inec.pt)

Types of Preventive Interventions

- Public Awareness**
 - Celebrations of International Children's Day June 1st
 - "The Children & Youth Forum"
 - County Assemblies with their participation (Interfaced with Schools)
 - Video and DVD's Productions about Children's Rights
 - Blogs (Professionally managed) for Rights Promotion
- Promoting Parental Responsibility**
 - Articulated "Parental Education" Programs
 - Sessions "Talking with Parents"
 - Teen pregnancy prevention awareness sessions
- Preventive Initiatives**
 - Healthy Food
 - Children's Health Problems
 - ATOD Sessions
 - Summer Camps for Children & Youth
 - Drawing Contests

Table 7

Discussion

the descriptive and qualitative results obtained globally express that though key-Informants express that the priority of the councils is to articulate the community response to children and youth at risk or in dangerous situations (72.7%), and the promotion of their well-being (39.4) (Table 3), the results observable in Table 5 that articulate the concrete actions taken in relation with the aims of the coalitions, the inter-institutional articulation and the internal organization (89% and 39% respectively) are contrasting that vision, meaning that coalition process tends to weigh more than result-oriented action.

Berkowitz (2001) suggests that these kinds of results may be a consequence of the methodologies selected for the studies, however here we are using the direct input of council leaders and when their assertions are confronted with the aims defined for the coalitions again process overlaps outcome. It is important to note that these leaders are highly committed to the cause of protecting children & youth and use and are very aware that this is not just a job but a mission, we are therefore interested in providing visibility to what Allen et al (2008) refers as the attempts to understand what are the core issues and what happens in coalitions.

Butterfoss, (1993) and many others consider coalitions crucial for Preventive efforts, we observed action taken in this area is mainly focused on public awareness activities and not necessarily anchored evidence-based or structured interventions (Table 7).

Within the leaders efforts to maintain an on-going collaboration table 4 demonstrates that dialogue, considering divergence healthy for coalitions, and opportunities for the membership to establish positive relations, that is consistent with the collaboration lessons proposed by Wolf (2010).