

The 12th Nordic Public Health Conference - Research-based abstract

Title: Involving citizens in community-based research - A prerequisite for securing sustainability of actions or a romantic idea about egalitarianism and unity in knowledge-based development?

Type of presentation: Oral presentation

Conference theme: "Health through partnerships"

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Background:

Few will dispute the importance of involving citizens in planning, organising and implementing actions addressing personal health and well-being. Citizen involvement fosters ownership and motivation to act voluntarily and decisively, and this strengthens impact and promotes sustainability. The present study goes one step further and addresses pro's and con's of involving citizens as *researchers* of their own local community. This is consistent with the principles of Participatory Action Research, which aims to maximize participation of citizens and other stakeholders in all stages of the research process.

The study describes processes of recruiting and working with young residents of a socially vulnerable neighbourhood in Copenhagen in research processes evaluating complex community-based interventions on health and social development. The study was carried out within the framework of the international Cities Changing Diabetes program and comprised one of several components in efforts to mobilise local community resources, social cohesion and action.

Theoretical framework:

The study is based on the supersetting approach to mobilise local communities for public health action. This involves the coordinated engagement of multiple stakeholders in multiple community settings. The supersetting approach includes five principles, namely 1) **integration** to ensure that activities are implemented across the boundaries of specific settings, 2) **participation** to ensure that people are motivated to take ownership of processes of developing and implementing activities, 3) **empowerment or action competence** to ensure that people acquire skills and competences to express and act on their visions and aspirations, 4) **context** to ensure that everyday life challenges of citizens and professionals are respected and considered in planning activities, and 5) **knowledge** to ensure that scientific knowledge is *used* to inform action and that scientific knowledge is *produced* from action.

Main results and conclusion: Strengths and weaknesses of involving citizens as researchers of their own community will be presented and discussed. This will be done step-wise starting with the preparations for recruiting citizens and ending with their local dissemination of research findings.

Significance for research, policy or practice: The implications of involving citizens as researchers will be discussed from two perspectives, namely 1) research objectivity and validity and 2) public accountability and fairness.

Key references:

Bloch, P., U. Toft, H.C. Reinbach, L.T. Clausen, B.E. Mikkelsen, K. Poulsen & B.B. Jensen. 2014. *Revitalizing the setting approach – supersettings for sustainable impact in community health promotion*. International Journal of Behavioural Nutrition and Physical Activity. 11:118. DOI: 10.1186/s12966-014-0118-8.