Rapid participatory appraisal (RPA) methodology for community health needs assessment

A summary of

How to cite this NCCMT summary:

Categories: Method, Program planning, Situational assessment

Method

Relevance For Public Health
The rapid participatory appraisal (RPA) methodology overcomes some of the limitations of traditional epidemiological approaches to studying population health. The RPA methodology is best suited to study the community health needs of populations in developing countries. The authors provide the example of a community health needs assessment using the RPA methodology for a rural village in Bali.

Description
The rapid participatory appraisal (RPA) methodology is a qualitative technique used to assess community health needs and promote social change and development. This resource describes the RPA methodology and offers recommendations on how to plan, conduct, implement and communicate a community health needs assessment using the RPA methodology.

Implementing the Tool

Who is Involved?
RPAs involve a cross-cultural, multi-sectoral and multidisciplinary team of predominantly external personnel. However, the RPA methodology should also include those who are responsible for the resources necessary to help address the potential health and social problems identified.

Steps for Using Tool
RPA is a research method used to collect information needed when formulating an action plan within a short time period and with the involvement of community members. The health information pyramid is a useful framework to guide data collection, as shown in the resource.

Below is a summary of RPA principles, steps and related methodologies, as well as the authors’ recommendations for RPA improvement and a new model to follow when using an RPA methodology.

Three RPA Principles:
1. Collect only relevant and necessary data.
2. Adjust investigations to reflect local conditions and specific situations.
3. Involve the community in both defining community needs and seeking possible solutions.

Step-By-Step Approach:
1. Data sources: key informant interviews, field observations, review of existing written documentation.
2. Data collection time period: 1 to 2 weeks.

3. Analysis: qualitative inquiry with triangulation of results in terms of dominant themes, interrelationships and existence of any inconsistencies, with data collected from one source verified by at least two other sources. Clarification of results can be done by additional data sources and collection.

Related Research Methodologies:
- Action Research (i.e., “look, think, act”)
- Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)
- Participatory Learning and Action (PLA)

Recommendations:
The authors propose 19 recommendations to improve upon the traditional RPA methodology and coin a new composite model, an Assets Focused Rapid Participatory Assessment Cycle, as outlined in the resource. Recommendations to improve the traditional RPA methodology described above include incorporating components of the ABCD and PLA methods.

Key elements added to the traditional RPA methodology fit across the following three areas: planning, data collection and communication.

Planning:
- Use a cyclical process.
- Be problem-focused and involve community leaders and stakeholders.
- Be solution-focused including considering resources and holistic perspectives to population, health, extent of relationships and community participation.

Data collection:
- Increase time for data collection and use mapping techniques.

Communication:
- Ensure regular and systematic communication, using visual aids or other.
- Provide a final report that includes intervention-based proposals for action.

Conditions for Use
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Evaluation and Measurement Characteristics

Evaluation
Information not available

Validity
Not applicable

Reliability
Not applicable

Methodological Rating
N/A Not applicable

Tool Development

Developers
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R.W. James  
J. Earnest

Method of Development

These summaries are written by the NCCMT to condense and to provide an overview of the resources listed in the Registry of Methods and Tools and to give suggestions for their use in a public health context. For more information on individual methods and tools included in the review, please consult the authors/developers of the original resources.
The model was originally intended for developing countries to gain insight into a community’s own perspective of its need. The current composite model was developed through an in-depth review of the current RPA methodology, with comparisons to related participatory and community-based approaches, and in consideration of experience with a rural village in Bali.

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2006

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**Resources**

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