|  |
| --- |
| **Title of Research Presentation** Strengthening community capacity building practice by integrating complex systems thinking methods  |
| **Background/Objectives**Strengthening community action continues to be a critical strategy of the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion and there is abundant literature on building community capacity for health equity. Communities are also increasingly described as complex adaptive systems yet there are not strong practical links between the rich community capacity building and complexity and systems science literature. The objective of this paper is to identify promising complex system thinking methods and tools that can be integrated with the state of the field understanding of strengthening community action.**Methods**A literature review using the Scopus database and grey literature was undertaken to identify a) innovations in building community capacity for health equity, and b) relevant complex systems thinking methods and tools to strengthen community capacity building practice. **Results**There is little in the recent literature regarding building community capacity that goes beyond strengthening established domains such as leadership, resources, knowledge and skill, partnerships and collaboration, participation in decision making, ongoing learning, shared vision and goals, communication, and sense of community. The most promising complex systems thinking method appears to be group model building techniques using systems dynamics tools such as causal loop diagrams. These diagrams are based upon increasing understanding of complex system behaviour particularly with respect to how nonlinear dynamics (e.g., interdependencies, feedback loops) shape system structure and function. **Discussion**Building community capacity to reduce health inequities could be strengthened with explicit use of system dynamics methods and tools such as group model building of causal loop diagrams. This would entail focused attention on the relationships and interdependencies among all community capacity domains (and not simply the extent to which they are present in a community). Following this, creating causal loop diagrams of the interactions among domains would support the identification of feedback loops that could be amplified and those that need disrupting to strengthen community capacity to address priority determinants of health. An example of a potential diagram is presented.**Keywords**Community capacity building, complex systems thinking |