



Participatory Action Research with Immigrant Women: Opportunities & Challenges

Rebecca Ganann, RN, MSc, PhD (student)
McMaster University



Learning objectives

- Overview of participatory action research (PAR)
- Using PAR in immigrant women research
- Opportunities to engage
- Challenges to consider
- Initiating engagement process: An example

PAR is an approach to research

- Actively engages members of population throughout the research process
- Intended to create structural change through:
 - Policy
 - Community development
 - Empowerment (Koch & Kralik, 2006)

Why consider PAR?

- Community co-researchers are central to knowledge creation
 - ↑ Research relevance, timeliness
 - ↑ Knowledge translation, utilization
- To meaningfully inform policies and programs that address health inequities

Why consider PAR for research related to immigrant women?

- Research '*with*' rather than research '*on*'
- Emphasis on social justice, SDOH
 - Can ↑ understanding of health disparities
- Develop culturally and contextually relevant interventions

Key principles of PAR

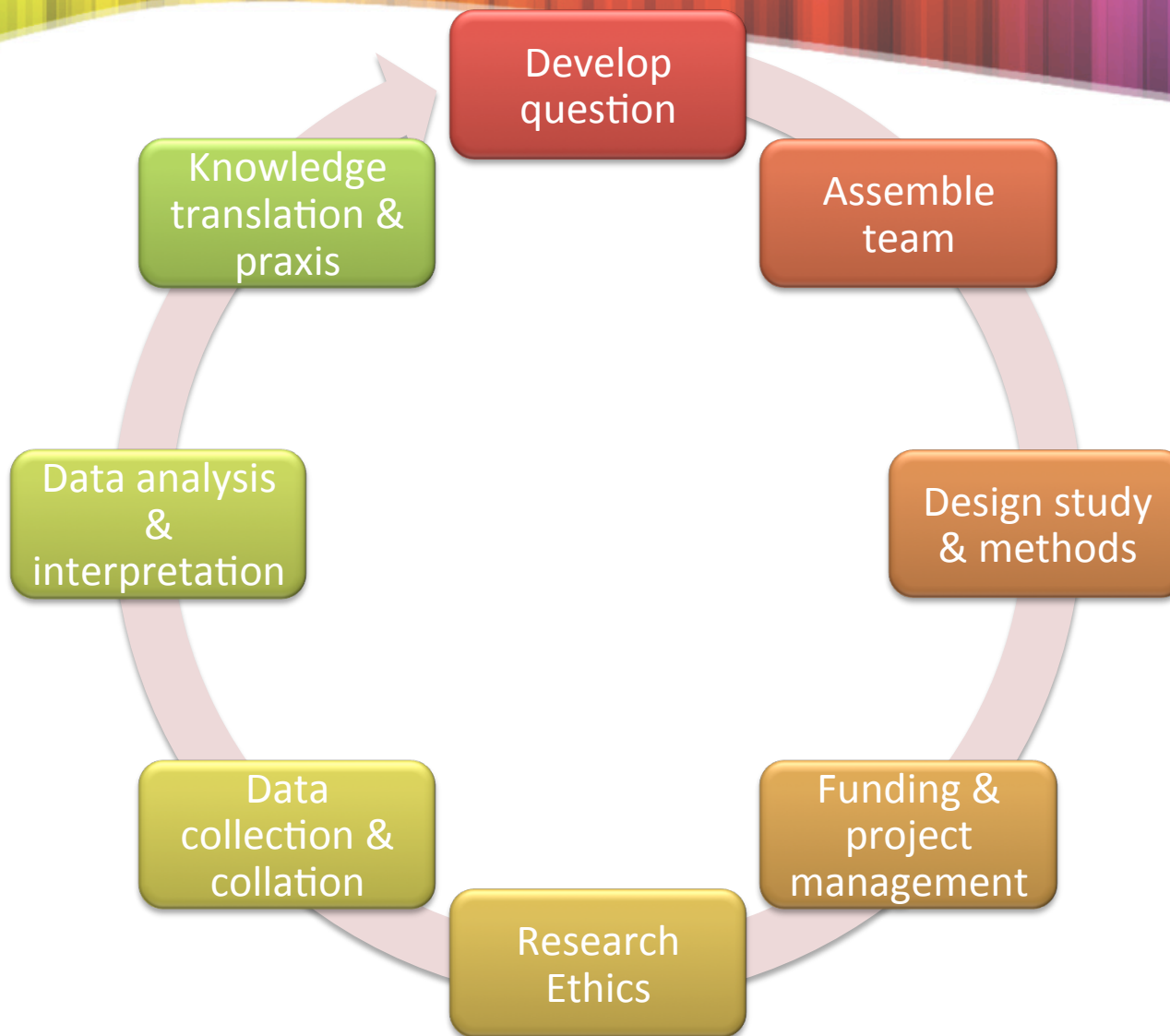
- Reciprocity & trust
- Collaborative development of project that is

• **ENGAGEMENT THROUGHOUT THE
RESEARCH CYCLE**

- Capacity-building – skills & knowledge, legacy
- Ensuring resonance of findings
- Reflexivity

(Genat, 2009; Olshansky et al., 2005)

The Research Cycle



Considerations:

- Critical in PAR to have early participation in setting the research question(s). Important to:
 - Project success
 - Sustained commitment as co-researchers
- Sharing power, negotiations, decision-making
- Recognizing 'community as expert', local assets, and needs

The research team should be comprised of:

- Academic researcher,
- Advisory group
- Community co-researchers
 - Immigrant women
 - Decision-makers
 - Advocates for immigrant women
 - Organizations who serve their community

Addressing power dynamics

- Power: social and historical constructs
- Immigrant women may understand power via:
 - Traditional gender roles
 - Hierarchical health care system (pre-/post-migration)
 - Marginalization experiences
 - Vulnerability
 - As new citizen
 - Immigration status

Several factors can affect immigrant women's participation in PAR studies

- Socioeconomic status
- Language/translation
- Cultural beliefs
- Childcare
- Meeting locations/accessibility
- Transportation

Critical considerations - 1

- Uncovering divergent perspectives that could undermine project
- Respecting and not silencing opinions yet moving the research forward
- ‘Methodologically low-tech’ yet can produce ‘high fidelity’ contextually based evidence (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000)

Critical considerations - 2

- Time required to:
 - Build team
 - Establish trust, mutual respect
 - Communication
 - Support true collaboration
- Requires budgeting & scheduling flexibility, time for training & support

Advantages of involving co-researchers

- Can ensure that risks & benefits are expressed in locally acceptable terms
- Can help overcome mistrust of institutional practices
- Access to 'situated knowledge'
- Insight into potential deleterious impacts of participation among community members
- Can provide voice for marginalized perspectives

Other advantages of utilizing PAR

- Opportunity to engage in critical dialogue
- Empowerment
- Increased access to community
- Critical insight into
 - Analysis
 - Local interpretations of data
 - Development of relevant intervention strategies, advocacy & action

(Caldwell et al., 2005; Genat, 2009; Savage et al., 2006)

Challenges of utilizing PAR

- Potential negative impacts
 - Could create mistrust
 - Further 'othering' of population
 - Essentializing experiences
 - For whom is the research undertaken
 - Who is capable of acting and advocating on behalf?
 - Ensuring community awareness that despite research, there may not be immediate funding/action

Limitations re: PAR literature

- Methodological
 - Mostly qualitative, community members engaged only at some stages of research, weak or poorly described methods
- Knowledge translation
 - Impact on service planning
- Action
 - Impact on service quality, utilization, accessibility

Initiating PAR: An example

- Issue: PPD among immigrant women, service accessibility
- Question: how to best meet women's needs
- Identification of common interest/problem
- Network of service providers
- Researcher



Conclusions

PAR is a promising approach for conducting research with traditionally marginalized populations in a way that is meaningful to them.

Acknowledgements and Contact



ONTARIO TRAINING CENTRE
IN HEALTH SERVICES AND POLICY RESEARCH
CENTRE ONTARIEN DE FORMATION
DE RECHERCHE EN POLITIQUES ET EN SERVICES DE SANTÉ

Rebecca Ganann, RN, MSc, PhD (student)

McMaster University

GANANNRL@mcmaster.ca