Impact of September 11th on Afghan community and women’s participation

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Overview

- Background of the study
- Theme—Impact of September 11th
- Social capital
Background on Study

Focus

- Describe Afghan women’s experience and meaning of community participation
- Identify outcomes of participation on
  - Participating women
  - The community
- Pilot study
- Main study
Afghan community

- 20-30,000 Afghans in South/East bay area
- Afghans refugees
  - Began arriving early 80s
- Multi-ethnic
  - Pashtun, Tajik
- Two primary languages spoken
  - Dari and Pashtu
- Muslim
  - Majority are Sunni
Methodology

Ethnography

- Naturalistic inquiry, with cultural knowledge and practices central to describing and analyzing routine ways in which people make sense of/live their lives

- Pilot study September 2000-March 2001
- Dissertation Research July 2002-December 2003
- Post study involvement
Description of the field

Fremont, California

- Hub of Afghan community
- Four community based organizations
  - Created entirely or in part by women
- Interaction with Afghans in various venues
Impact of September 11th

- Initiated a crisis that produced significant changes
- Identified 3 phases
- Using the image of a pendulum
Crisis Pendulum

- Extreme Disruption
  - Initial Shock
  - Regrouping
  - Returning to Center
- Refugee, Flight
- Resettlement
- Center Pre-9/11
Initial Shock

- Time frame
- Fear and Stress
- Responses of CBOs
  - Generational differences
- Opening up
- Bringing the community together

Both Generations ‘Getting serious’
Fear and Stress

“At first, I was concerned about it. Others were afraid. We are Muslim and I wear a scarf. Maybe they don't like us. But, thanks God, nothing bad happened.”

Previous trauma re-experienced
Shame and anger
“Before the community was afraid, what is going to happen, how is the government looking at us as Afghans. On the Memorial Day, mayors, police came and said you are the same as other Americans, don't be afraid. It was wonderful.”

Expanding mental health programs
“I remember the first meeting of SAP (Society of Afghan Professionals), post 9/11. I think we had the largest attendance ever, we had so many new faces. All these people came and were just looking for the sense of warmth and comfort from being amongst their “own kind,” you might say. Just looking for answers and looking for comforting because of what happened, the direness of the situation and everyone’s uncertainty as to what was going to happen next.”
Both Generations
‘Getting serious’

“I say, pre 9/11, it was a social thing where Afghans just like being around each other because they had things in common and it was fun. But then, post 9/11 is when everyone got serious, and we’re all like wow! We need to do something that’s going to hold the community together and especially with this whole reconstruction thing happening in Afghanistan.”
Regrouping

- Prioritizing/organizing
- Forging partnerships/finding resources
  - New sources of funding
  - New foci of interest
- Returning home/reconnecting
“I’m so thankful that I’ve been back to Afghanistan now and that I feel like I’ve reconnected to that side of who I am for once in my life. But, now that I’ve actually been to Afghanistan and I actually know that it exists and I’ve touched the ground, you know what I mean? It’s a completely a different feeling now. I think, if anything, it’s even more pushed me to stay involved in the community to ensure success in the future.”
Returning to Center

- Reflecting on the impact
- Lessons learned
- Frustrations-Loss of hope
- Future challenges
Reflecting on 9/11

“Of course it was a horrible tragedy and for all those families. But for Afghanistan, it was good. It brought world attention to Afghanistan, especially the plight of Afghan women.”
Young women’s reflections

“It opened up a whole new world, I think, to the Afghan youth here in the Bay Area particularly, because now we can actually go back to Afghanistan. Now we can actually partake in reconstruction projects. Prior to that, with the Taliban being there, especially as a women, I never even dream of it. I mean, I did dream but that’s all it was. I never thought it would become a reality.”
Frustrations/loss of hope

“Of course, I support America, I am American; but I think what they are doing is wrong or misguided. They don't understand Afghanistan.”

Fatigue—loss of hope
Postscript

- Future challenges
- Changing of foci of CBOs
  - Funding
  - Human resources
- “Becoming more professional”
  - Moving away from a volunteer model
- Impact on social capital
  - Issue of trust
Social Capital

Features of organization, such as trust, norms and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions
Putnam--1998

Community level resource

Community participation is thought to produce social capital
  • Social capital measured by volunteering

Key aspect--trust
Changes in Social Capital

Pre 9/11 Context

Afghan women’s participation

4 Active community organizations

Afghan Community

Social Capital

Increasing Social Capital
- Partnering/resources
- Connecting with others
- Expanding foci/skills

September 11th /Aftermath

Decreasing Social Capital
- Lack of unity
- Visibility of divisions
- Mistrust
Conclusions and Implications

- Demonstrated the vulnerabilities and strengths of this community
- Women’s community participation mattered

Outcomes

- Short term--Increased social capital
- Long-term--Social capital is contingent upon changing contexts and human capital