Thinking “Outside the Box” on Family Violence with Systems Thinking

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Structural violence as systemic patterns

When one husband beats his wife there is a clear sense of personal violence, but when one million husbands keep one million wives in ignorance there is structural violence.


(Redrawn from Galtung, 1969)
Structural violence as a dynamic problem

(Adapted from Galtung, 1969)

1. What *can we* prevent?
2. How do we do get there?
3. Is what we are doing working?
Systems thinking iceberg metaphor for structural violence

Events

Patterns over time

Structure

Values, attitudes, and norms

E.g., ‘family’, gender roles, culture, social needs, …
Most severe

100

Education programs

Income Assistance

Housing Programs

Health Services

Mental Health Services

No need

Affordable Housing
Long-tailed distributions of needs

Complicated = detail complexity

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Complex
Hurricane has $2.53 \times 10^{22}$ molecules of air interacting with a boundary layer of water in a set of universal differential equations
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Dynamic complexity
Domestic violence involves interaction among multiple actors (e.g., abuser, victim/survivor, children, police, counselors, teachers, etc.) adapting and changing rules of social system in response to emergent behavior
System Dynamics

System dynamics is the use of informal maps and formal models with computer simulation to uncover and understand endogenous sources of system behavior (Richardson, 2011).

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Group Model Building

- Participatory method for engaging stakeholders in model building
- Andersen & Richardson (1995); Vennix (1996)
- Community based system dynamics
- Reason for GMB:
  - Seeing the system together
  - Sharing system insights
Using models to understand interventions in complex environments
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- No insults + treatment (3 mo)
- No insults
- Microaggressions
- Microaggressions + shock + treatment (3 mo)
- Shock + treatment + shock
- Shock + treatment

Wellness

Month
Identifying and addressing capability traps

• Getting trapped “putting out fires” with no time for process improvement (Repenning & Sterman, 2002)

• Difficult to see and address in child welfare services

• System dynamics helps identify and coordinate multisectoral solutions
System dynamics for learning systems for prevention

Organizational learning is facilitated:

• Variety of knowledge and expanded possibilities for action
• Degree of shared comprehension and interpretation is uniform (Hodgkinson & Sparrow, 2002)

Boundary objects (Black & Andersen, 2012)

System dynamics provides unique visual language for learning systems
Closing reflections

Engaging communities is an intervention with valued tangible and intangible benefits

“Structural empathy” – having and knowing others understand the structural complexity of a situation

Identifying and sharing knowledge

Complexity a fact of life, having tools makes it more manageable

Believing people can learn how to model and use models
Thank you!