Staying Close from a Distance: Strengthening Social Support Amid COVID-19
Hello!

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1. Learning Outcomes
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- Name and identify forms of informal and formal supports; and predominant theories informing the role of social support in health and mental health.
- Describe the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic has compromised social support across cultures while forcing new, emerging meaning and types of support.
- Describe, use, and train others in the use of an online social support network mapping tool (SSNM) developed for evidence-based health promotion interventions and social work practice.
2. Agenda
Agenda

- Introductions and check-in
- Define social support
- Examine role of social support in health and mental health
  - Theoretical basis for support in stress and coping
- Impact of COVID-19 pandemic
- Profile of impact on Latinx community in NYC
- Introduce SSNM background and current digital tool
- Demonstrate SSNM use for mapping, analyzing and strengthening supports
- Q & A
“What is required to transform the world is dialogue, critical questioning, and love for humanity”

-Paulo Freire-
Psychoeducation

- Well-being in the face of trauma and other stressors
- Individual, family, & community strength & support
- Collaborative community of care
- Cultural relevance & context
- Identify & build on individual & collective strengths & hope
- Builds on Social justice & anti-oppressive practice

*Freire, 1970

Knowledge as power*
Why 'physical distancing' is better than 'social distancing'

Experts laud WHO move to use physical distancing, saying social distancing or isolation isn’t good for mental wellbeing.

by Saba Aziz
30 Mar 2020

Physical Distancing v Social Distancing

Hello, how are you?

Hello ?????

I’m not OK
Social Support

Definition
What is Social Support?

“Exchange of resources between at least 2 individuals perceived by the provider or the recipient to be intended to enhance the well-being of the recipient”

-Shumaker & Brownell, 1984-
What is Social Support?

“Reduces, or buffers, the adverse psychological impacts of exposure to stressful life events and ongoing life strains”
Bring us together!
4. Social support on health and mental health
Brief History of Social Support

Mary Richmond
Informal and formal social supports
Social case work among new immigrants to the U.S. and work in communities in NY

Jane Addams
Settlement houses. Building from the individual level to community level supports

John Barnes (1954)
Knit networks in Norway

John Cassel (1976)
Epidemiologist, first to publish findings that social support serves as a key psychosocial “protective” factor

Tracy & Whitaker (1990)
Social Support Maps and Networking measures
Four types of social support

- Emotional Support
- Instrumental Support
- Informational Support
- Social Companion-ship
Four types of social support

1. **Emotional Support** = Esteem Support

Being accepted by others and having one’s self worth validated
Four types of social support

2. **Informational Support** = *Advice = Appraisal*

Receiving help in defining, understanding and coping with problems
Four types of social support

3. Social Companionship

Spending time with others in recreational activities; may serve as a distraction from stress
4. **Instrumental Support** = practical

Being provided with material, tangible, goods, or services, e.g. money, childcare, borrowing a car, getting a ride, etc.
Poll
What is a Social Support Network?

1. A person-centered web of social relationships
2. A theoretical construct describing a connection of social supports used for studying support
Social Media as Social Support

How Big Is Facebook?

Facebook has more active users than China has people (figures in billions)

- Facebook Monthly Active Users: 1.39
- Population of China: 1.36
- Population of India: 1.24
- Population of the United States: 0.319

Source: Facebook, CIA World Factbook
Poll
Functions of social support: Health sustaining and stress reducing

1. **Gratification of affiliative needs** = decreased feelings of isolation and loneliness, increased feelings of worth and belonging

2. **Maintenance and enhancement of self-identity** = increased development of personality which can be either positive or negative

3. **Self-esteem enhancement** = validation of one’s sense of value and adequacy.
Theoretical Foundations of Social Support

- **Social exchange theory** (Cobb 1976, Shumaker & Brownell 1984)
  Giving and receiving

- **Social competence** (Cassel 1976; Pender 1987, White 1959, Lawton 1983)
  Effectively interact with our environment

- **Social comparison theory** (Swann & Brown 1990; Festinger 1954, Stewart 1993)
  We compare ourselves to others
What is Stress?

1. A psychological and physical response of the body that occurs whenever we must adapt to changing conditions, whether those conditions are real or perceived, or if they are positive or negative.

2. Stress has biological, cognitive and sociocultural components.
Three major categories of stress

- **Life events**: acute changes, including major behavioral changes for a short period of time

- **Chronic strains**: persistent/recurrent demands => readjustments over a prolonged period of time

- **Daily hassles**: over the course of the day
Human Response to stress

**Selye’s Model**
- Alarm
- Resistance with the aid of stepped-up adrenal secretions
- Exhaustion, collapse or relaxation

**Freud’s Model**
- Anxiety
- Defense mechanisms
  - Repression
  - Rationalization
  - Projection
  - Sublimation
  - Regression

**Lazarus’ Model**
- Emotional disturbance
- Master-behavioral patterns (fight, attack)
- Physiological Reactions (adrenal secretions, quickened heart rate)
- Mental disturbance
Its not stress that kills us, it is our reaction to it.

(Hans Selye)
Transactional model of stress
(Lazarus, Folkman, 1984)
How does social support influence coping with stress?

- **Main effect:** Social support is always helpful in times or stress or not
  
  "more is better"

- **Buffering effect:** Social support helps to buffer our experiences of stress by providing support enabling us to reappraise the situation

  "it’s not so bad"
5. Impact of COVID-19 pandemic
Physical distancing: sheltering, “lockdown”
Daily, chronic and emergent stressors leading to compromised mental health
Lack of traditional access to social supports
Isolation ≠ Loneliness
New ways of staying connected and feeling support
What role can social support play and how may we strengthen it?
6. Profile of Impact of COVID-19 on Latinx community in NYC

South Bronx, an example of community based needs
NYC Context & COVID-19

Death rates in NYC

- Latinx individuals (34%)
- Black (28%)
- White (27%)
- Asian (7%)

High concentration of COVID-19 cases in the Bronx, Queens, and Brooklyn

The Bronx is poorest district in US

Sources: NYS Department of Health, 2020, US census, 2017
160 Latinx families

Survey conducted by the Mexican Coalition, March 2020
68% Have been living in NYC for more than 14 years

78% Have no enough money to pay for food, rent, and basic needs

91% Have children younger than 18 years old
COVID-19 AND ITS EFFECTS ON LATINX LIFE CYCLE

- Childhood and Adolescence
- Pregnancy
- Adulthood
Latinx and life cycle amid Covid-19

**Pregnancy**
- Lack of appropriate nutrition/food insecurity
- Prenatal care
- Giving birth in isolation separated from family
- Anxiety, depressive sxs, sleep problems

**Childhood & Adolescence**
- Limited space at home
- Food insecurity
- Lack of internet
- Lack of resources for e-learning
- Worrying about family’s financial insecurity
- Fear of parents/family members getting sick or dying
- Anxiety, depressive sxs, sleep, appetite problems
Latinx and life cycle amid Covid-19

Adulthood

Structural inequality (e.g., unemployment, underemployment, housing, food insecurity)
Essential workforce, yet not enough protection from systems
Thwarted parent's ability to meet their children's basic and emotional needs
Breakdown families' abilities to cope with and to engage in loving family ties
Impact the tight-knit relationships, which is known to be an important protective factor for youth growing up in poverty
Losing family members of COVID-19
Dying in isolation
Lack of religious and proper funeral services
Inability to support family members in their country of origin
Fear, anxiety, depressive sx$s, sleep problems
6. Social Support Network Map SSNM

Introduction
Background
Digital Tool
SSNM

- Web-based tool
- Evolved from early versions of paper-based social network and ecomapping tools.
- Developed by Dr. Susan Witte and members of the investigative team at the Social Intervention Group to test the implementation of a web-based HIV prevention intervention for couples called Connect (NIMH R01 MH080659).
7. SSNM Demonstration
Social Support Network Map
Topic: Social support with my children while I am struggling with covid-19
Owner: Carolina

Support Type
- Empathy
  - Susan (friend),
- Advice
  - Susan (friend), Mexican Coalition
- Social
  - Susan (friend),
- Practical
  - Susan (friend), Sam (student CUSSW), Mexican Coalition
Interventions to strengthen social support

- Group vs. individual interventions;
- Professionally led vs. peer-provided treatment;
- Interventions where
  - an *increase of network size* or perceived support was the primary target vs.
  - those where *building social skills* (to facilitate support creation) was the focus
Increasing network (informal)

- Connecting in new ways with known supports
- Support groups
- Clubs with shared interests
- Community events

What kinds of things have you done in your life to increase your network?
Increasing network (formal)

- Resource and referral
- Strengthen by practicing help seeking skills
  - Making phone call
  - Requesting a referral
  - Visiting an agency
  - Following up
Social network interventions for health behavior change

- Systematic review over 23,000 papers yielding 39 rigorous studies of 4 types of intervention:
  - Individual: using network data to identify individuals
  - Segmentation: directed to groups of people clustered in a network
  - Induction: activation of existing social ties to diffuse healthy behaviors; and
  - Alteration: changing the structure of the network by addition of new or deletion of old members.
Preparation for Practice

- Create your own SSNM for
  1) general support and
  2) support for a specific issue for work
- With a partner take turns conducting a social network map using the online tool with each other.
- Conducting an analysis of social support network
  - What is the “issue for work?”
  - Where are there strengths?
  - Weaknesses? How to strengthen?
Considerations for Preparation for practice

▣ For the client
  □ How did you find the process of having an online map constructed about you?
  □ What did the clinician do that made you feel particularly good, strong, engaged, understood?
  □ What did the clinician do that might have improved your experience?
  □ Did your network look any different this time compared to when you constructed your own? How?

▣ For the clinician
  □ What was challenging? Surprising?
  □ What additional tool did you choose to use and why?
In summary

- **Social support** occurs when you believe that others are perceptive and receptive to your needs.
- One need only perceive social support for it to be beneficial.
- There are many health and mental health benefits to social support, including reduced stress and improved overall health.
- The COVID-19 Pandemic has challenged us to find new ways to support each other despite physical distancing and we are they can be implemented to successfully reduce health and mental health risks and outcomes.
- SSNM useful tool to engage in discussion and counseling regarding the important role of SS in our lives especially as a way to buffer from or reduce negative health/mental health outcomes.
Thanks!

Questions?

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Credits

- Mexican Coalition
- Presentation template by SlidesCarnival
- Photographs by google images