The Measurement of Social Capital

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Outline

- Define social capital and describe how it is measured
- Describe the process of validating social capital survey questions
- Present a case study on creating a social capital survey instrument in Bangladesh
- Provide insight into social capital survey research in general
Why measure social capital?

- Social capital has been shown to be associated with physical health, mental health, health behaviors, and health care access.
- Provides theoretical basis for assessing the impact of community-based health promotion programs.
- Lack of evidence linking social capital to health in low-income countries.
- Lack of reliable measures that have been validated in low-income countries.

(Kim et al., 2008; De Silva et al., 2005; Lindström, 2008; Derose & Varda, 2009; Story, 2014; Campbell & Jovchelovitch, 2000)
Define social capital and describe how it is measured
What is social capital?

- A broad term including social relationships, networks, and values that facilitate collective action for mutual benefit.

- Theories of social capital tend to be dichotomized into two forms: **structural** and **cognitive**
  - **Structural**: What people do as measured by individuals’ actions and behaviors.
  - **Cognitive**: How people feel as measured by individuals’ attitudes and perceptions.

(Woolcock, 1998; Harpham et al., 2002; Krishna & Shrader, 2000)
How is social capital measured?

- A survey-based approach is commonly used to measure specific components of social capital
- Structural social capital
  - Group membership/involvement
  - Informal social relationships
  - Collective action
- Cognitive social capital
  - Trust (generalized or interpersonal)
  - Social cohesion

(Harpham et al., 2002; Narayan & Cassidy, 2001)
Describe the process of validating social capital survey questions
The need for validation

- Social capital survey questions can be interpreted differently in different cultural settings.
- There is a need to validate the content of social capital survey questions in each cultural setting.
- Both quantitative and qualitative methods can be used to validate survey questions.
Quantitative validation

- The most common quantitative validation technique is **psychometric validation**
  - Focuses on discriminant validity
  - Examines the lack of association among constructs that are supposed to be different
  - Does not include the respondents’ perspective

(De Silva et al., 2006)
Qualitative validation

- Common qualitative validation techniques include expert review, focus group discussions, and cognitive interviews.
  - Focuses on content validity.
  - Ensures that a theoretical construct is accurately translated into operational measures.
  - Does not assess whether the tool behaves as it should, given the theory of the construct.

(De Silva et al., 2006)
Survey question validation process

- **Expert reviews**: Assess whether the survey questions are appropriate for measuring the construct
- **Focus groups**: Explore what people know and the terms they use to talk about the topics covered in the survey
- **Cognitive interviews**: Examine how respondents understand the questions and formulate their answers

(Groves et al., 2009; Story et al., 2015)
Cognitive interviewing (1)

- Systematically examines the question-and-answer process from the respondents’ perspective
- Two sub-types of cognitive interviewing: think-aloud interviewing and verbal probing techniques
- Focuses on four cognitive tasks required to answer a survey question:
  - Interpretation
  - Retrieval/recall of information
  - Judgment formation
  - Response mapping

(Beatty, 2004; Willis, 2005)
Cognitive interviewing (2)

1) Interpretation
   - What does the respondent believe the question to be asking?
   - What do specific words and phrases in the question mean to the respondent?

2) Retrieval/recall of information
   - What types of information does the respondent need to recall in order to answer the question?
   - What type of strategies are used to retrieve information?

(Willis, 2005)
3) Judgment formation

- Does the respondent devote sufficient mental effort to answer the question accurately and thoughtfully?
- Does the respondent want to tell the truth? Does he/she say something that makes him/her look "better"?

4) Response mapping

- Can the respondent match his or her internally generated answer to the response categories given by the survey question?

(Willis, 2005)
Present a case study on creating a social capital survey instrument in Bangladesh

Motivation

- In Bangladesh, many development organizations aspire to improve health and well-being through community-based strategies.
- A better understanding of the measurement of social capital in Bangladesh will help elucidate the pathways through which these strategies affect health and health behaviors.
- This is the first social capital survey instrument to be cognitively tested in Bangladesh.
Study aims

- Examine the content validity of the measurement of social capital used in the shortened and adapted Social Capital Assessment Tool (SASCAT) in an urban and rural setting in Bangladesh
- Propose a newly adapted social capital survey instrument that can be used by future health and development organizations in Bangladesh
Setting

- One rural sub-district (Durgapur) and one urban slum (Mirpur) in Bangladesh
- Selected based on the high rates of poverty, low levels of literacy, and poor infrastructure in each area.
Identify survey instrument: SASCAT

Expert reviews:
- Suggestions from De Silva and colleagues (2006)
- Independent review by social capital expert
- A final review by our research team from ICDDR,B

Focus groups: Four FGDs conducted separately for men and women in the two survey areas

Cognitive interviews: 32 cognitive interviews consisting of 18 structured survey questions followed by scripted verbal probes
Verbal probes (1)

- Collective Action

- In the last 12 months, have you talked with a local authority or governmental organization about problems in this area?

- Probing questions
  - Can you tell me in your own words what the question is asking? (Interpretation)
  - Who do you include when you think of a “local authority or government organization?” (Response mapping)
**Verbal probes (2)**

- **Trust**
  - Do you think that the majority of people in this area would try to take advantage of you if they got the chance?

- **Probing questions**
  - Can you tell me in your own words what the question is asking? (Interpretation)
  - What does the phrase “take advantage of” mean to you as it’s used in this question? (Interpretation)
  - In general, is it okay to talk about this in a survey, or is it uncomfortable? (Judgement formation)
Data analysis

- The expert reviews and FGDs contributed to changes in the survey instrument, including terminology and response options
- Cognitive interviews were transcribed and translated into English
- The transcripts were analyzed in NVivo 10.0 using a deductive approach to thematic analysis
- Codes were developed based on seven categories of problems embedded in survey questions
Changes to the new survey

- Separate the question about group membership into two questions
- Remove all questions about actual support received from groups and individuals
- Retain questions about potential support with both individuals and groups in the response options
- Reframe collective action questions to focus on community development
- Add the response option “sometimes” to questions about trust and social cohesion
Shortened and Adapted Social Capital Assessment Tool-Bangladesh (SASCAT-B)
Group membership

☐ In the last 12 months, have you been a member of the following types of groups in your area?

☐ In the last 12 months, how would you describe your involvement in the groups in which you are a member?
Social support

- Suppose you had something unfortunate happen to you, such as a father’s sudden death. Who would help you in this situation?
- Suppose you suffered an economic loss, such as job loss (urban)/crop failure (rural). In that situation, who do you think would assist you financially?
- Suppose you are (female)/your wife is (male) preparing to give birth to your (female)/her (male) first child. Who do you think would provide you (female)/her (male) advice or assistance in this situation?
Collective action

- In the last 12 months, have you joined together with others in your area to address important issues?
- In the last 12 months, have you talked with a local leader, chairman, or governmental organization about the development of your area?
Trust

- Can your neighbors be trusted?
- Can leaders in this area be trusted?
- Do you think that the majority of people in this area would try to take advantage of you if they got the chance?
Social cohesion

- Do the majority of people in this area generally have good relationships with each other?
- Do you feel that this area is yours?
Provide insight into social capital survey research in general
Remaining challenges

- Measuring group membership
- Reframing questions about social support and collective action
- Assessing social trust
- Tailoring the survey instrument to fit the social and political context
Measuring group membership

- Difficult for respondents to answer.
- Only asking about “participation” can confuse the number of groups one belongs to with the level of involvement.
- **Level of involvement** is an important aspect of social capital that should be carefully measured.
- Expands the range of weak ties among individuals and promotes the creation of social trust and norms of reciprocity at the community level.
Reframing questions about social support

- Questions were reframed as *potential* sources of support using hypothetical scenarios to avoid possible correlation with negative life events.
- Consistent with Bourdieu’s theory of social capital.
- Can identify disparities in access to each potential source of social capital.
Reframing questions about collective action

- If questions focus on community problems, then communities with high levels of collective action might be associated with social divisiveness, which is an indicator of low social capital.
- To avoid this potential correlation, use questions that focus on **community development**.
Assessing social trust

- Generalized trust is difficult to measure and can be an inaccurate approximation of relational trust.
- There are few individuals who trust everyone or who trust one person completely with respect to all things.
- Questions about trust should focus on interpersonal trust, which is a better representation of social capital.
Tailoring the survey instrument to fit the social and political context

- The microfinance culture in Bangladesh is important to understanding group membership, social support, and trust.
- Group-based microfinance is based on self-selected groups of borrowers who are jointly liable for loans.
- Borrowers decrease lenders’ risk of investment by finding the “right” people to join the group.
- Individual’s who are excluded from these groups are also denied other types of resources.
Conclusions

- To facilitate the interpretation of the effects of complex social constructs on health, it is important to validate survey questions using qualitative methods.
- These validation methods led to a social capital survey instrument that can be added to a larger population-based survey in Bangladesh.
- As efforts to accurately and reliably measure social capital continue to improve, evidence for the linkage between social capital and health will be strengthened.
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Thank You

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