



Perceptions of Risk and Crisis Among Vulnerable Populations



Kimberly J. Cowden, Department of Communication, North Dakota State University, Fargo, North Dakota, 58105 - Major Project Advisors: Dr. Robert Littlefield (NDSU), Dr. Tim Sellnow (University of Kentucky)

Introduction:

In response to the limited research about the effect of ethnicity on perceptions of risk and crisis communication messages, this study extends our understanding through the viewpoint of Somali, Hmong, and Native American cultural groups. Using a community-based participatory research approach this study helps us better understand:

- how to developing risk and crisis messaging for Native and New Americans
- appropriate use of spokesperson with underrepresented groups
- how the 10 best practices in risk communication are perceived by Native and New Americans.

Phase One Method (2005-06):

Focus Group Series: (All facilitated by a member of the cultural group.)

Somali (three sets: food consumers, food-related business people, and community leaders). Conducted in Minneapolis, MN, Spring of 2006.

Hmong (three sets: (three sets: food consumers, food-related business people, and community leaders). Conducted in Minneapolis, MN, Spring of 2006.

Native American (two sets: Elders and young ones). Conducted with the four recognized Tribes of North Dakota (Standing Rock Nation, Fort Yates; Three Affiliated Tribes, Fort Berthold; Turtle Mountain Chippewa, Belcourt; Spirit Lake Nation; Fort Totten), from January - August, 2006.

Procedures:

Two crisis messages were developed by leading risk and crisis scholars. One message was an example of a "good" message, providing self-efficacy steps, and assurance of ongoing investigation and communication. The "poor" message lacked the aforementioned elements. A video production company produced the messages with the following spokesperson representation.

- First Spokesperson: white male in his early 40s.
- Second spokesperson: ethnic female in her late 30s.
- Third spokesperson was a member of the underrepresented community who delivered the message in the native language (when applicable).



Phase One Findings:

Spheres of Ethnocentricity (Littlefield & Cowden, 2006)

The closer the risk or crisis is to the individual sphere, the more directly the individual will perceive and respond.



Message Testing: Use alerts and make it look official. Participants indicated a preference for members of their own cultural, group.

Deliverables: In addition to several presentations and papers, we published *10 Tips for Risk and Crisis Communicators When Working or Conducting Research with Native and New Americans* - which is available for download at <http://risk-crisis.ndsu.nodak.edu/>

Social Science Literature:

Message Development:



Message Delivery:

Current literature advocates a pre-crisis strategy of establishing a crisis management team. Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer (2003) advocate that such teams include personnel from, "public relations, legal affairs, operations, security, top management, a designated crisis spokesperson and others with appropriate skills and resources" (Seeger et al., 2003, p. 158). The emphasis of this study examines the primary spokesperson which is consistent with current theoretical practice (Barton, 1993; Benoit, 1995; Heath, 1997; Seeger et al., 1998) or the careful selection of experts and a designated spokesperson to disseminate clear and consistent information (Coombs, 1999; Novak & Barrett, 2005).

Who is designated as a spokesperson and how that spokesperson disseminates crisis responses to stakeholders has yet to be fully examined when crisis teams are communicating with cultural groups.

Cultural Considerations:

The Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988) model for understanding the influence of cultural variability on communication in interpersonal settings states that language, ecology, history, and communication affect the sociocultural variables influencing social cognitive processes, situational factors, affect dimensions of communication, and habits of behavior. These elements lead to understanding and intention, ultimately producing communication with another person. The facilitating conditions stemming directly from the situational factors ultimately affect the communication.

Conducting Community-Based Participatory Research:

The concept of community-based participatory research (CBPR) has emerged in the public health arena as a way to involve the community members, organizational staff, and researchers in all aspects of the research process. As Israel, Schulz, Parker, and Becker (2001) note: "Partners contribute their expertise and share responsibilities and ownership to increase understanding of a given phenomenon" (p. 184). Benefits of CBPR:

- findings should be relevant to people and researchers.
- helps build relationships and overcome trust issues.
- improves quality and validity of research by using the local knowledge of the people involved.

Phase One - Part two (2006-2007)

Community-based participatory survey administration to test the 10 best practices in risk communication and cultural learning styles among Northern Plain Indian groups.

Project Facilitation:

This project was approved through the IRB at NDSU and by each community's Tribal Council. We trained four tribal college students per community to administer the surveys. Benefits to the community from this project included: financial gain, experiential learning opportunity for those students who may wish to pursue a research focus, and full disclose to each community about research findings.

Participants:

Using tribal housing lists in each community, 130 were randomly selected and given to field researchers. We surveyed 100 residents in each Native community to produce generalizable findings for Northern Plains Indian Nations. Each participant was paid a \$20 Wal-mart card.



Phase One - Part two Findings:

Participants strongly agreed that the best practices that pertained to forming partnerships, coordinating networks, listening to public concerns, and planning pre-vent logistics were supported. The data indicates a need for crisis planning. It is a recommendation from this project is that community leaders works to design, implement, and continuously update a crisis plan for the community. Additionally, participant perspectives indicated a desire to have leaders seek collaborations and establish risk and crisis networks in advance of a crisis. Furthermore, we recommend that Native American communities work to identify federal, state, and local agencies that can assist in risk mitigation.

References:

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Israel, B. A., Schulz, A. J., Parker, E. A., & Becker, A. B. (2001). Community-based participatory research: Policy recommendations for promoting a partnership approach in health research. *Education for Health*, 14(2), 182-197.

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Phase Two (2006 - 2007)

Extending the message testing and 10 best practices in risk and crisis communication among multi-cultural groups. This project was a collaboration among several researchers and institutions.

- Middle East (Wayne State University, Dr. Julie Novak)
- African American (University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Dr. Rob Ulmer)
- Latino (University of Minnesota, Diana Harvey and HACER)
- Somali (University of Minnesota, Diana Harvey and Farhiya Farah)
- Sudanese (North Dakota State University, Janet Fitzhuspen, Kimberly Cowden and Dr. Robert Littlefield)

Procedures:

Based on findings from the first phase, one crisis message was developed by leading risk and crisis scholars addressing a possible contamination of spinach. Participants viewed three to four videos (some included community language preference at the open).

Following is the spokesperson representation.

- First spokesperson: white male in his early 40s, delivered message alone.
- Second spokesperson was a representative of the cultural group who presented alone and in English.
- Third scenario presented a member of the cultural group introducing a white spokesperson, urging the community to listen.
- A fourth scenario was developed for the Latino and Middle Eastern groups in which cases, the community spokesperson introduced the white spokesperson in the language of the cultural group (Spanish and Arabic). The spokesperson delivered the message in English.



White Spokesperson



Middle Eastern Spokesperson



Latino Spokesperson



African American Spokesperson



Sudanese/New American Spokesperson

Preliminary Findings:

- In cases where language was an issue, participants preferred the entire message in the language of the cultural group.
- While participants indicated a preference for members of their cultural group as a spokesperson in phase one, many of the groups appreciated the third scenario of a member of the cultural group introducing a credentialed speaker because some stated they can't believe everything people say from members of their own cultural group.
- Several groups indicated a great mistrust for law enforcement and stated they would be the last resort when seeking assistance in a crisis.

Phase Three (2007-2008):

Message testing for learning style preference with the general population. This project is currently underway. Subject matter experts are finalizing a scenario of intentional catastrophic food contamination. We will then develop the video segment for testing with the general population. Project facilitation will occur at the University of Kentucky.

Projected Phase Four (2008-2009):

Adaptation of phase 3 from the general population to message testing for learning style preference among cultural groups. Phases three and four will help in developing messages that resonate across cultural barriers so we can be better prepared to deliver messages that elicit action.

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