

Models of Participatory Research

There are many models for participatory research, all of which value democratic participation, community involvement and follow-up action. However, there are a number of ways in which these goals can be achieved. There are five models outlined here with short examples of the types of research for which they have been used:

1. Participatory Action Research (PAR)
2. Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR)
3. Participatory Learning and Action (PLA)
4. Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR)
5. Empowerment Evaluation (EE)

These all require community involvement in research projects, but the roles of the researcher(s) and the community members vary. Participatory Action Research relies on the researchers to move the project forward and to coordinate community action. It is the basic model for participatory research. On the other end of the spectrum, Empowerment Evaluation does not require the presence of a researcher at all unless the community decides that they would like outside help with their project, though most do choose to work with a professional evaluator or researcher. The remaining models fall between PAR and EE in the balance of researcher input to community control that they suggest.

1. Participatory Action Research is a research method that brings together researchers and community members so that they can work together to identify problems faced by the community, to empower community members to research and create solutions to those problems, and to improve conditions in the community.

There are four major phases of participatory action research.¹ These phases occur iteratively and can be repeated as the research team raises new ideas and new goals.

- **Reflecting:** In the reflection phase, all members of the research team—including both community members and outside researchers—meet together to discuss and define the research problem. This phase also provides an opportunity for community members to raise concerns as well as to share their views with the outside researchers and with each other.
- **Planning:** The planning phase is when the research team creates the strategic framework for how they will work with the community and foster an environment of trust and communication between the research team and the larger community.
- **Acting:** In the acting phase, the strategies determined in the planning phase are carried out.
- **Observing:** In the observation phase, the research team analyses the data generated.

The final outcome of participatory action research should be a more informed, empowered community that has experienced improvements in areas of interest as a result of collaborating with the outside researchers.²

Studies using PAR include: *Participatory Action Research to Understand and Reduce Health Disparities* (Olshansky, E. et al.); and *Participatory Action Research in Practice: A Case Study in Addressing Domestic Violence in Nine Cultural Communities* (Sullivan, M. et al.). This study works to understand the cultural context of domestic violence, to evaluate the services available for women who are battered, and to discover women's ideas for how to improve domestic violence services within their communities.

2. Community Based Participatory Research is a variation of Participatory Action Research that promotes democratic participation in community life through social science research. *Its innovation is the creation of a "reference team"* but the method otherwise follows the PAR framework.

- In the beginning of a CBPR study, researchers meet with all interested community members and community groups to recruit members for a "reference team" that serves as the voice of the community among the researchers.
- Once the researchers and the reference team create a research plan and a follow-up plan, the researchers carry out the plan by conducting focus groups, or by using whatever data collection method the group agreed on.³
- Once the data has been analyzed, the researchers and the reference team work together to carry out the follow-up plan with the community.

Studies using CBPR include: *A Study in Sexual Health Applying the Principles of Community-Based Participatory Research* (Reece, M. and Dodge, B.)⁴; *Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) in South Africa: Engaging Multiple Constituents to Shape the Research Question* (Mosavel, M. et al.). This study began as an effort to improve cervical cancer prevention in black South African women, and the research team expanded the effort to 'cervical health' that encompassed cervical cancer, STDs, sexual violence and other social problems.

3. Participatory Learning and Action is another variation of Participatory Action Research that began in rural development research. There are three foundations of PLA.

- Outsiders facilitate, but do not dominate meetings.
- Facilitators use methods that emphasize openness over closed discussion, group identity over individuals, visual over verbal learning, and comparisons over measurements.
- There is emphasis on sharing information and experiences among researchers and participants as well as between participating organizations.⁵

These foundations mean that the researchers learn from the community and make sure that *community members are in charge of developing the research plan, analyzing data and creating an action plan*. The researchers are there to facilitate the community members' activities and to draw out diverse members and opinions of the community. PLA calls for significant involvement from all members of the community that is participating in the research process.

Studies using PLA include: *Embracing Participation in Development: Worldwide Experience from CARE's Reproductive Health Programs With a Step-by-step Field Guide to Participatory Tools and Techniques* (Shah, M., et al). This study focused on adolescent sexual health in

Zambia and worked with teens to measure public knowledge and to find and remove barriers to access to reproductive health services.

4. **Feminist Participatory Action Research** is another variation of Participatory Action Research that adopts the PAR framework, but *puts special emphasis on reflexivity on the part of the researchers and on full participation by community members.*⁶ This variation on PAR requires:

- Researchers to consider power imbalances in the research structure and their role in maintaining these power imbalances.
- Researchers also need to be a part of the community being studied, and must be aware of and be held accountable for their actions.
- Researchers must also be aware of silences in the voice of the community and must work to make sure that all people who are interested in participating feel comfortable doing so.⁷

Studies using FPAR include: *Putting the “Participatory” in Participatory Forms of Action Research* (Frisby, W. et al.); and *Exploring Gender, Management Education and Careers: speaking in the silences* (Gatenby, Bev and Humphries, Maria). The first study brought together researchers and low-income women to increase access to recreational activities for women in the community.

5. **Empowerment Evaluation** assumes that there is already a program or coalition with a plan to carry out a research or evaluation project in place. *There are three steps in conducting an empowerment evaluation that can be carried out by the group alone or in conjunction with an outside researcher or evaluator if the group decides to bring in additional help.*

- Participants create a mission for the program.
 - If an evaluator or researcher is involved at this point, she conducts training for the program staff and facilitates the evaluation process.
- Participants review what resources are already in place in the program and what strengths the participants bring.
 - They can also use these strengths to advocate for internal institutional change if necessary.
- Participants create a plan that includes goals, strategies for achieving those goals, and a methodology to evaluate if the goals were met.
 - This work may lead participants to new insights about their roles and about program dynamics, and the results of the evaluation should be to empower program staff to evaluate their own work and to challenge barriers to organizational goals.⁸

All of these steps are carried out by the group as a whole, and participants are encouraged to discuss their feelings about the progress being made as they move from one step to another.⁹

Studies using EE include: *An Empowerment Evaluation Model for Sexual Assault Programs: Empirical Evidence of Effectiveness* (Campbell, R. et al.); *Empowerment Evaluation as a Social*

Work Strategy (Secret, M. et al.)¹⁰. These studies track the success of guided empowerment evaluations in helping organizations develop the capacity to plan and carry out further effective evaluations without outside guidance.

	PAR	CBPR	PLA	FPAR	EE
Who initiates the project?	Researchers and community groups	Professional Researchers	Professional Researchers	Researchers and community groups	Community Groups
Who develops the research question?	Researchers and community groups	The research team (researchers and community group members)	Community groups with assistance from researchers	Researchers and community groups (with emphasis on community voice)	Community Groups with an optional researcher or evaluator.
Who conducts the research?	Researchers and community groups	Professional Researchers	Community Groups, facilitated by researchers	Researchers and community groups (with emphasis on community voice)	Community Groups with an optional researcher or evaluator.
Who analyzes the data and develops research findings?	Researchers and community groups	Professional Researchers	Community Groups, facilitated by researchers	Researchers and community groups (with emphasis on community voice)	Community Groups with an optional researcher or evaluator.
How is research linked to advocacy?	Research findings are used by the researchers and community groups to support community efforts to effect change	Researchers work with community groups to use research findings for positive action within the community	Community members create an action plan based on research findings; researchers help with that plan and use findings to attract outside help for the community	Participating in the research process can serve as a community empowerment tool, and research findings are used by community groups and researchers to plan interventions	Community groups use research findings to carry out internal reforms and to refine their efforts to effect change in their communities
Who owns the research and how is it disseminated?	Ownership of the research findings is shared, and the evaluator or researcher presents the research at the request of the community group	Ownership and obligation to disseminate research findings are shared by researchers and community groups	Researchers own and present findings to the community groups	Results are communicated throughout the research process, and researchers, community groups, and individuals in the community share the findings and work together to publicize the findings.	The community group is the primary owner and disseminator of the research findings, but the evaluator may also use the findings in academic research

¹ Olshansky, E. et al. (2005) *Participatory Action Research to Understand and Reduce Health Disparities*. Nursing Outlook; 53:121-6.

² Sullivan, M. et al. (2005). *Participatory Action Research in Practice: A Case Study in Addressing Domestic Violence in Nine Cultural Communities*. Journal of Interpersonal Violence; 20:8:977-995.

³ Mosavel, M. et al. (2005). *Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) in South Africa: Engaging Multiple Constituents To Shape the Research Question*. Social Science and Medicine; 61:2577-2587.

⁴ Reece, M. and Dodge, B. (2004). *A Study in Sexual Health Applying the Principles of Community-Based Participatory Research*. Archives of Sexual Behavior; 33; 3: 235-247.

⁵ Shah, M. et al. (Eds). (1999). *Embracing Participation in Development: Worldwide Experience from CARE's Reproductive Health Programs With a Step-by-step Field Guide to Participatory Tools and Techniques*. CARE.

⁶ Frisby, Wendy, et al.. (2005). *Putting the "Participatory" in Participatory Forms of Action Research*. Journal of Sports Management; 19:367-386.

⁷ Gatenby, Bev and Humphries, Maria. (1999) *Exploring Gender, Management Education and Careers: speaking in the silences*. Gender & Education; 11:3:281-294.

⁸⁸ Campbell,R. et al. (2004). *An Empowerment Evaluation Model for Sexual Assault Programs: Empirical Evidence of Effectiveness*. American Journal of Community Psychology; 34; 3/4: 251-262.

⁹ Fetterman, David and Bowman, Cassie. (2002). *Experimental Education and Empowerment Evaluation: Mars Rover Educational Program and Case Example*. The Journal of Experiential Education; 25:2:286-295.

¹⁰ Secret, M. et al. (1999). *Empowerment Evaluation as a Social Work Strategy*. Health and Social Work; 24; 2: 120-128.