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GREY MATTERS

A GUIDE TO COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH WITH SENIORS

Nancy Marlett and Claudia Emes

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A Guide to Collaborative Research with Seniors

Nancy Marlett and Claudia Emes

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Appendix 8

Report of the Focus Group Meeting with CJCA Seniors Club

August 1, 2004;

Location: Japanese Cultural Association

This is an example of a summary of focus group research,
prepared for the participants.

Ethnocultural Research Team and their responsibilities:

Marilyn Akazawa, flip-chart recorder

Fouad Henin, process observer

Aida Henin, timekeeper

Anne Hartley, observer

Mo Watanabe, facilitator

The facilitator opened the meeting with welcoming remarks, an overview of the Kerby Centre of Excellence/University of Calgary Seniors Resilience Project and the specific goals of the Ethnocultural Research Team. An invitation and consent form was circulated and each participant was requested to read and sign the consent form, and all did so. The agenda and time commitment for each question was included in the invitation.

Definition of resilience:

To begin the discussion from a common base of understanding, the group was asked, in general, for definitions, and, in particular, for examples of resilience. The participants offered many views and perspectives of resilience including:

- Ability to spring back from traumatic life's events
- A new beginning or the ability to move and look forward despite some traumatic event
- Not only to spring back but to end up stronger than before the traumatic event
- Emotional strength and growth resulting from traumatic events
- Perseverance through difficult periods – a Japanese word “gambari” describes it well
- To accept, come to terms with, adapt to loss or the situation, as opposed to rejecting or fighting – Japanese words that describe the sense are “shikataga nai” (nothing can be done), “akirame” (to accept)

Some members amplified the definition by telling their own stories and providing examples of resilience. The participants shared some emotional, heart-breaking tales from their own lives including:

- Surviving through world war
- Surviving death of a child, spouse
- Separation from families
- Crossing language and cultural boundaries

The group identified reasons why resilience is important to them, such as:

- Health
- To cope with life's event
- To move forward
- To reconnect with the world
- To accept, come to terms with loss
- Survival – strength to live
- To assist with the spiritual healing of the heart
- To become more sympathetic of others suffering traumatic events

The group identified the following factors that make people more or less resilient:

- Role model, teaching of parents
- Family support, marital support
- Support of friends
- Cultural heritage
- Societal and/or cultural expectations
- Unconditional love from friends, strangers
- Surviving major trauma

- Awareness of not being alone
- Perseverance
- Happy events
- Pride in children
- Childhood memories
- Desire to live vs. wanting to die – no fear to live a new life
- Hope to continue living
- Healthy community – community support – associations, organizations
- Associations such as CJCA
- More groups (like this focus group) – sharing experiences is good for resilience
- Physical health and fitness, nutrition, spiritual and mental well-being

The group felt that it was important to recognize those who are less resilient, especially if help is to be provided. Some characteristics of less resilient people were considered to be:

- Often are loners, unhappy, complainers, and negative thinkers
- How can you teach people how to become resilient?

The group felt that resilience is something that can be taught or transferred but felt that people need to come to their own realization that they need help. Do they know they are negative or do they even care?

Some suggestions for assisting:

- Reach out to those who need help – support groups
- Encouragement from family and friends

- Force them to re-join the world of the living
- Give them lots of unconditional love and support
- General education and raising awareness of the concept of resilience
- Set example
- Exercise mentally and physically
- Take their hand and show them the way
- Circle of friends
- Sharing information
- Need to raise awareness with medical community
- Meeting for tea, or just ‘dropping in’
- Talk to elders of community
- Reconnect to the traditions
- Storytelling

Characteristics of resilience:

The group was asked to comment on whether there are things, such as gender, ethnicity, and cultural heritage that affect resilience:

Gender

- Women seek support from friends; their resilience and strength comes from sharing and support of one another. Women find it easy to connect to others. Men are less likely to seek help and support from others. It may be viewed as a weakness.

Intergenerational

- Will be different for children, for each generation as the “trauma” and adaptation issue may differ.
- External environment is different for each generation – TV, computer, and computer games changes the focus and priority of social interaction.
- The social structures and institutions of our parents’ time are disappearing – it might be important to preserve, resurrect those that promote resilience.
- Loss of traditional culture is growing – each generation loses more.

Cultural Traditions, Ethnicity

- Cultures help you to understand and prepare you to deal and cope with life’s situations. You learn how to be resilient.

Communication

- Technical society – takes away from talking to each other.
- Storytelling is important to learn the mistakes and lessons of the past.
- Family album a good way to tell a story about each person in the family. Keep a journal of grandchild – their comments at a young age – things they notice.

Future Research Questions

The following research questions are derived from the discussion and answers that were offered in the focus group. They form the research questions that should be addressed in a broader project.

- a. Differences between different cultural/ethnic groups and coping strategies
- b. How cultural traditions/understandings create community and individual resilience
- c. How community associations such as CJCA assist individuals in becoming and/or maintaining their resilience
- d. Record and document stories of resilience in day-to-day living in addition to examples of resilience under extraordinary circumstances
- e. How to recognize people who are not resilient
- f. Is resilience teachable? How?
- g. Are there intergenerational issues amongst ethnic/cultural groups that increase our understanding of resilience?

Participant's Evaluation of the Focus Group

General Comments:

- Everyone found the day's purpose and discussion enlightening.

One commented that she had not thought about resilience as an important characteristic of people's lives. One commented that she had not related resilience to ethnicity and cultural traditions before this but now realizes how important the relationships are. Almost everyone would appreciate feedback on what we learn of resilience in seniors.

Specific comments:

- Resilience has a new meaning for me.
- Very enjoyable and enlightening listening to people's lives.
- Never thought club was important to our well being. Some members thank you for attending community activities when in fact we are reaping benefits.
- Good to use brain to learn new things.
- Music and learning are good tools to keep brain active.
- Didn't think resilience was connected to culture – hardship builds resilience.
- Requirement of resilience is a good sense of humour.