

Burke, J. G., & Albert, S. M. (Eds.). (2014). *Methods for community public health research: Integrated and engaged approaches*. New York, NY: Springer. 278 pp.

Review by Richard Goranflo

Community health education is an especially hot topic in higher education today. The expansion in community health degree programs and enrollments that has occurred during the past decade suggests that there is great interest in pursuing community health research as a career. A new federal emphasis on coordinated care models and newly developed grants available for community-based research are additional recent factors that make it crucial for public health educators and practitioners to have as many tools as possible to address the complex and even unanticipated issues that will arise.

Methods for Community Public Health Research: Integrated and Engaged Approaches is a unique resource in that it provides both an introduction to community health research methodology for beginners and an in-depth guide for advanced researchers. Burke and Albert stipulate this as their goal early in this edited volume, and they execute it admirably. Their selection of authors includes those who present varied and sometimes overlooked research methods, with examples illustrating their potential application.

The premise of this book is that community health research is a subdiscipline of public health that requires its own approaches to research. The complexities of studying community health present researchers with issues more challenging than merely selecting between qualitative and quantitative approaches. The editors assert that integrated research methodologies (also known as mixed-methods methodologies) are often better suited for obtaining accurate and useful data in community health research. Burke and Albert divide the book into two broad categories for understanding the data available to community health researchers: inferring the meaning of numbers (Chapters 2-5) and inferring the meaning of words (Chapters 6-9).

Chapters 2 and 3 focus on spatial analysis and agent-based modeling (ABM), both of which emphasize ecological models predicated on people's interactions with their environments and the impact of those interactions on health outcomes. Predominantly featured is the idea of using geographic information systems (GIS) and ABM to model community behavior. A noteworthy aspect

of these early chapters—one that sets the tone for the rest of the book—is the authors’ discussion of methodologies varying in degree of sophistication and cost. Multiple computer models are identified as well as sources of information that could be useful for everyone from graduate students to current practitioners. The authors even cover how to use existing and free data in conjunction with free GIS models to begin producing one’s own spatial analyses. Beyond collecting and modeling one’s data, Chapters 2 and 3 also emphasize that creating community partnerships is vital for adding meaning to data.

Chapter 4 explores the use of network models and how interactions shape health outcomes. It helpfully opens with an easy to understand introduction to the concept of “shared conditions” (*p.* 69), using a neighborhood structure model as a straightforward example. Simply put, how does a neighborhood arrange itself based on the preferences of those who live there? Contributing author Keane walks the reader through an activity that feels more like active learning than reading. Once the reader has a basic understanding of network structure, more advanced methods are described for readers with larger and more complicated data sets.

One method, described in Chapter 8, that may be new to many readers is Visual Voices, which is based on the principles of community-based participatory research. According to contributing authors Ochtera, Rak, and Yonas,

Visual Voices began in 1993 as a project that provided a creative and fun opportunity for free expression, learning, and relationship development that crossed age, gender, race, and economic boundaries.... Visual Voices projects use multiple creative arts-based painting, drawing, and writing sessions to create and explore topics of interest with a community group. (*p.* 197)

The authors offer an example drawn from research with a group of adolescent youth in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, regarding the topic of gender dynamics in relationships. Individual participants were asked to create paintings representing their feelings on an array of topics, as well as written stories accompanying their paintings. Paintings and stories were then coded for themes so that researchers could quantify which themes appeared the most by gender. Creative expression activities are not common in com-

munity health research, but as the authors argue, they could be especially useful in research involving adolescents.

The remaining chapters of this book extend the strengths exemplified in the chapters just described by adding thoughtful discussions of realist evaluation (Chapter 5), concept mapping (Chapter 7), and news media analysis (Chapter 9). Chapter 10 concludes the book by summarizing how each method is important in furthering the advancement of modern community health research.

One critique of this book I would offer involves the introduction of system dynamics in Chapter 6. Although system dynamics is a valid tool for community health research and is appropriate in certain situations, it is a very time-intensive and resource-heavy method that seems a bit out of place in this book. The discussions of other methods start with examples one can essentially try for free with existing data, but system dynamics more or less requires the researcher to dive into the deep end. Seasoned community health researchers may feel comfortable with this treatment of the topic, but less experienced researchers and graduate students may find it a bit overwhelming. Perhaps even moving it to Chapter 9 would have made a bit more sense in terms of the flow of this book.

Despite this single minor criticism, I highly recommend this book. It is an important resource for anyone interested in community health research. The writing is so accessible that it would even be an appropriate text for relevant upper-division undergraduate coursework. It includes a wide variety of integrated research methods that borrow from many different disciplines, thus offering approaches to the types of multivariable questions that often must be addressed in community settings. Even the most seasoned community health researcher is likely to find something new in the methodologies explored by the authors of this volume.

About the Reviewer

Richard Goranflo is the program manager for the School of Medicine's Graduate Studies Program at Oregon Health & Science University. His research focuses on aspects of faculty wellness with specific interest in biomedical research programs. He earned his Ed.M. from Washington State University and is currently completing an Ed.D. in educational leadership at Portland State University.

