Accessing Rural Populations for Nursing Research: Challenges and Lessons Learned

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Introduction
• Approximately 17% of the population of the United States lives in rural areas
• Those who reside in rural areas tend to have poorer health and less access to health care resources than those living in urban areas.
• Conducting nursing research in rural areas can be challenging
• This task can be especially challenging when it involves researching a sensitive topic such as adolescent suicide

Context of Current Study
• Delphi study of rural mental health practitioners to determine what issues are most important to parents whose child has made a non-lethal suicide attempt
• Web based two step survey

Aim
To describe experiences while recruiting participants for research related to adolescent suicide focused on rural populations

Steps in Accessing Our Rural Population for Research
- Sent emails to 8 rural county health department administrators describing research study and asked to refer us to agencies who provide mental health services to adolescents and families. Four responded
  - Finding mental health resources in rural counties
  - Finding right contact person to communicate with

- Followed up with telephone calls and messages
  - Made contact with one more health department
    - Four health departments referred us to Sinnissippi Centers-serves surrounding 4 rural counties
  - Made contact with director of child and adolescent services to describe research
    - Made appointment to meet with director and two lead staff to give more detail on methodology and aim of this research

- Worked with director to receive IRB approval from agency
  - Made appointment to attend all staff meeting to announce research study and answer questions
    - First link sent to research survey sent to staff

Facilitators
• Previous relationship with local health department staff
• Centrally located family mental health resources for surrounding 4 rural counties
• Very caring staff who want to help their clients
• Staff see value in this research and possible positive implications for their practice

Barriers
• Finding mental health resources in rural counties
• Finding right contact person to communicate with
• Far distance from university
• Agency not familiar with research method
• Lack of trusting working relationship with university
• Small numbers of staff

Lessons Learned

Reduce Barriers
• Make personal contact early in process
• Make effort to travel to rural areas for meeting
• Educate providers on research methodology
• Keep communication lines open throughout and after research is completed
• Partner with site for dissemination and future research

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