



Perceptions of 4-H Agents about Problems and Solutions in Reaching Youth in Underserved Communities in North Carolina

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INTRODUCTION

- ❖ The role of the 4-H Extension Program is to prepare youth for being responsible citizens and leading the 21st century workforce (Cochran, Catchpole, Arnett, & Ferrari, 2010).
- ❖ Youth participation in 4-H can have a significant impact on positive youth development (Mulroy & Kraimer-Rickaby, 2006).
- ❖ The 4-H program's mission is to help youth gain the necessary skills they need to be preemptive assets in their communities and develop ideas for a more innovative economy (Tempel, 2010).
- ❖ However, getting youth involved in 4-H programs within underserved communities presents challenges for 4-H agents serving in those communities.
- ❖ This situation can have a lasting negative effect on how youth in these communities develop as productive and responsible citizens.
- ❖ Understanding the problems and solutions in reaching youth in underserved communities is helpful for serving these youth with effective educational programs.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- ❖ The theory of social capital provides the framework for conceptualizing this study.
- ❖ Social capital is described as an "asset by virtue of actors' connections and access to resources in the network or group of which they are members" (Lin, 2001, p.19).
- ❖ Based on this notion, Lin (2001) described four reasons to explain why embedded resources in social networks contribute to the outcomes of actions: a) facilitation of the flow of information, b) ability of social ties in the system for exerting influence on the members, c) social ties to individuals reflecting their access to resources through networks, and d) the ability of social relationships to reinforce identity and recognition of members.
- ❖ This social capital theory can be used to examine how Extension can link with youth and their parents in underserved communities.

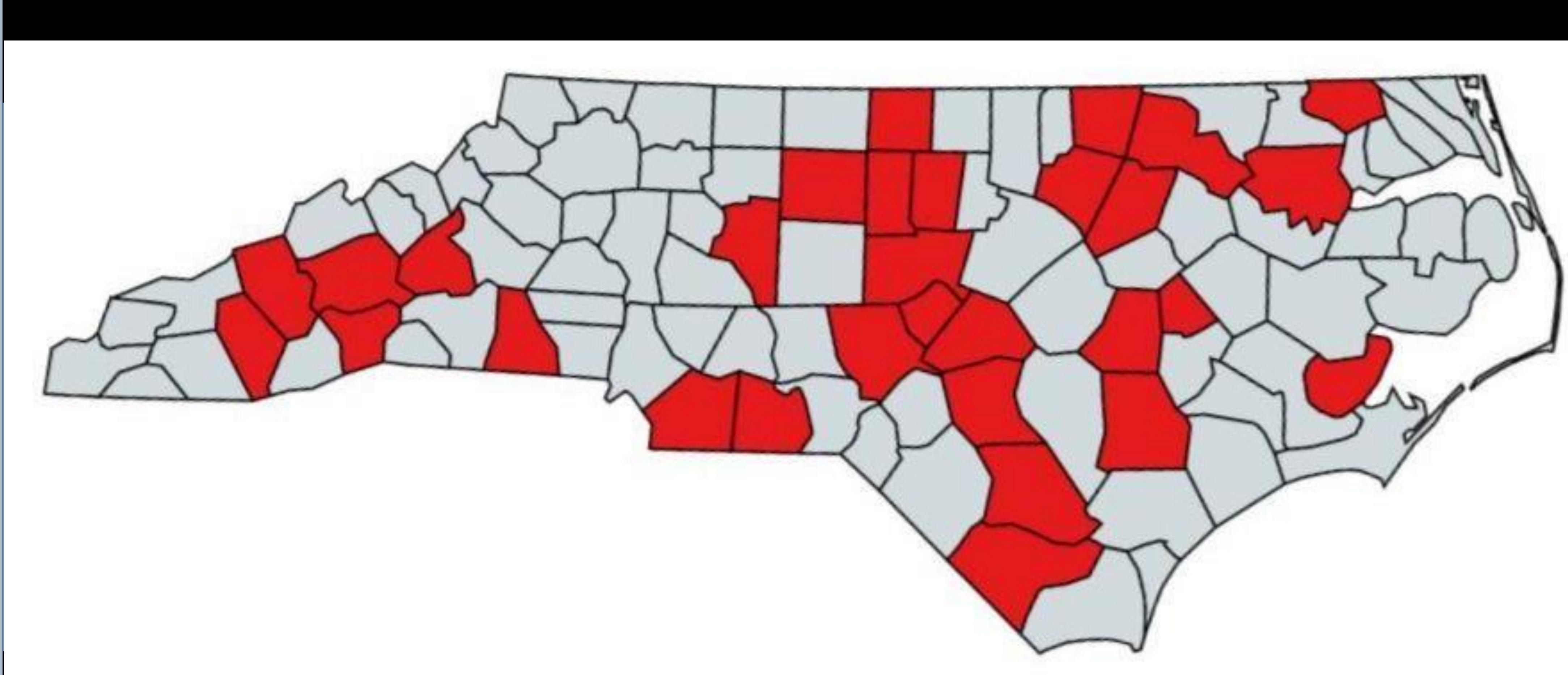
PURPOSE & OBJECTIVES

- ❖ The purpose of this research was to determine the perceptions of 4-H Extension agents in reaching youth in hard to reach underserved communities in North Carolina (NC). The study aimed to accomplish two objectives:
 - To determine the problems in reaching youth in underserved communities.
 - To determine solutions for reaching youth in underserved communities effectively.

POPULATION & LOCATION

- ❖ The study was conducted with a group of 32 4-H Extension agents in NC.
- ❖ This group was identified by the Associate State 4-H Program Leader as agents in counties serving underserved communities.

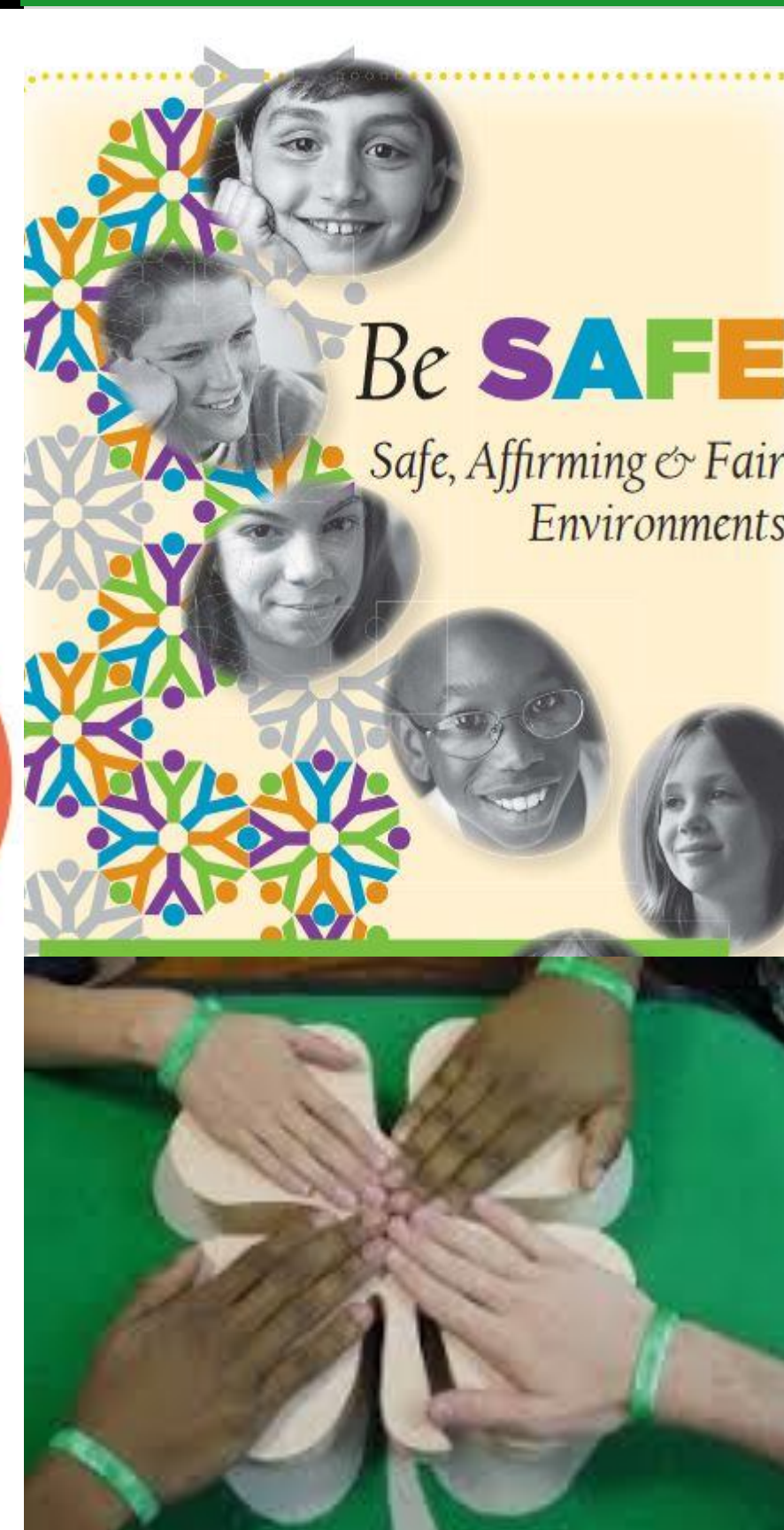
COUNTIES REPRESENTING UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES



SOCIAL CAPITAL THEORY



4-H



4-H (JOIN THE CLUB)



FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

- ❖ The study found nine major problems and eight solutions in reaching youth in underserved communities.
- ❖ The identified major problems were: a.) lack of transportation, b.) lack of community volunteers, c.) lack of funding, d.) lack of parental support, e.) lack of parents' awareness about available 4-H programs, f.) parents' interests in other activities for their children, such as sports, g.) lack of community network and support, h.) distance to program location, and i.) cultural and language barriers.
- ❖ The identified major solutions to those problems in reaching youth in underserved communities were: a.) allocation of more state funding or reducing the cost of state and district 4-H activities, b.) volunteer development modules especially designed for these communities, c.) securing grants to support youth in these communities, d.) innovative marketing strategies to make parents aware of 4-H programs, e.) offering programs within their community location, f.) recruiting more volunteers from the community, g.) streamline volunteer screening process and pay for background check as an incentive, and h.) taking measures to educate parents that the 4-H program is good for all kids.

METHODS

- ❖ This was a modified Delphi study that was completed in three rounds.
- ❖ In the first round, agents were asked two questions: a) what are the problems they face when reaching youth in underserved communities, and b) what are the solutions they recommend for reaching youth in underserved communities effectively?
- ❖ In the second round, responses from round one were listed as unique items and sent to the agents for seeking any additional responses.
- ❖ In the third round, the agents were asked to rate the importance of each response for the two questions on a 5-point Likert type scale (1=least important, 2=somewhat important, 3=important, 4=very important, 5=extremely important).
- ❖ The items rating 85% and above by panel members as important, very important, or extremely important in the third round were considered as important problems and solutions in analysis.

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

- ❖ When reviewing the major problems and solutions in reaching youth in underserved communities, it is clear that building social links with the community members using existing social capital (assets) is the best option to overcome many of these major problems.
- ❖ Lack of community volunteers, lack of parental support, lack of parents' awareness about available 4-H programs, parents' interests in other activities for their children, lack of community support, and cultural and language barriers are problems that may be able to be resolved by finding ways to link with the existing social capital in underserved communities.
- ❖ A possible avenue 4-H agents can pursue to link underserved communities with the 4-H program is by using identifiable community leaders such as pastors and educators to promote 4-H.
- ❖ These community leaders' existing linkages with the community can be used to not only market the 4-H program, but also help to find additional volunteers and educate parents about the 4-H program, validating it as an important program for kids in the community.

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