

## Research:

# Paamiut Asasara and DPU, Aarhus University

The programme includes on-going evaluation and research. The steering committee of the programme decided that the research should be designed as participatory action research as it should contribute to – and be part of – the development of the programme and thus, be organised in line with the guiding values and principles of the programme. The research must address locally defined or accepted research questions and the results should be useful for the community. On this background, it may be possible to analytically and theoretically generalise the knowledge achieved as part of a more generic knowledge on community mobilization. The objectives of the research are as follows:

- To examine the impact of the activities to improve socially endangered children and families' conditions.
- To examine how the improvement of the socially endangered families is linked to improvement in options for vocation, housing, and communication between the citizens and the authorities).
- To document outcomes in the programme's five objectives (cf. section 1.).
- To contribute to a comprehensive understanding and implementation of community mobilisation methods aiming to support socially endangered children, families, and communities.

The research will include qualitative as well as quantitative methods and will apply a triangulation of data, researchers, methods and theories to ensure a high degree of validity, relevance, and applicability.

Interview series from 2004-2005 showed that the citizens of Paamiut experience a high degree of pleasure in spending time together, activities in the natural environmental, and a high level of a feeling of safety. The interviews also showed that there is a strong desire for a well-functioning school, a good nursery school/kindergarten environment for children/young people, and a higher degree of experienced safety. The *Arctic Living Conditions Survey (SLICA)* (2006) came to similar conclusions. It showed a high level of well-being in Paamiut and underlined that the strength of family relationships and social networks in the local community is of great importance to the individual's quality of life. The majority of the participants in the study responded that they have very strong ties to their families and maintain frequent contact. Only a small proportion of the

respondents feel lonely or marginalized. 14% reported that they have considered suicide at some point in their life.

The respondents found that alcohol and substance abuse were major problems in the community. 25% declared to have alcohol problems at home, and 49% responded that they experienced alcohol problems in their childhood home. Approximately 8% responded that they struggle with a daily abuse of hashish. In regards to safety, more than 90% of the respondents reported that they feel safe going outside their homes at night.

On UNICEF's Danish website, the article *Catastrophic lack of data on the conditions of lives of Greenlandic children*, states that in 2005, the United Nations Children's Committee recommended that the Danish government address the major problems with infant mortality, malnutrition, and suicide among children and adolescents in Greenland. The United Nations Children's Committee also points to the fact that there is a very limited amount of data and knowledge of Greenlandic children's situation, which makes it difficult to determine whether it is possible to effectively comply with the United Nations Children's Convention. The Committee therefore recommends that the authorities strengthen data collection on the life conditions and rights of children.

In recent years, various organizations such as Save the Children and the Red Cross have set up shelters for children in several cities in Greenland, and one of the organizations Save the Children is currently developing educational programs for Greenlandic parents. An increased awareness of the extent of the neglect of children in the Greenlandic society, in recent years, is the organization's goal.

There is a special section on Greenland's children in *the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child - Denmark's third report to the UN Children's Committee (August 2003)* and there has been a particular focus on violence against children with the UN report on violence against children globally (Pinheiro, 2006).

In 2007, MIPI – Documentation Center for Children and Young People – published two reports on children's conditions in Greenland (Wulff & Nielsen, 2007; Schnorr, Wulff & Nielsen, 2007). These showed, among other things, that more than 9 percent of all children (1,416 children were included in the study) now live below the UN's poverty line. Furthermore, one out of every third child lives in a household that has received compulsorily assessed financial aid from the government. In the reports, it is described how living in such an environment may interfere with child development and the benefits of the societal offers to children (eg. nursery school, kindergarten, primary school, recreation, education). It is also denoted that one third of adolescents aged 15 to 17, have considered suicide.

Incest and other sexual abuse of children on Greenland is a problem that has been identified in a number of descriptive reports (most recently in Christensen et al., 2008). It has been demonstrated that approximately 30 percent of the Greenlandic girls and 10 percent of boys have been victims of sexual assault.

Our baseline assessment in Paamiut – in early 2008) showed that hospital staff estimated that

around one third of the children are born into families where there is a risk of neglect, due to one or several of the risk factors mentioned below. Three kindergarten managers estimated that approximately 1/10 of the children who come into the day care centres are exposed to some type of neglect. School teachers assess the percentage of neglect accordingly. The figures are estimated on the basis of the extensive experience of hospital staff, kindergarten staff and primary school teachers. Social Administration and the police estimated that over 50% of the children and their families would benefit from psychosocial support. Specific risk factors for the family include: (1) alcoholism or hashish abuse, (2) unemployment, poor housing and poor economy, (3) violence or crime, (4) parents suffering from neglect in their own upbringing, (5) single parent-households, (6) teenage parents (7) mental health problems, and (8) physically disabled children.

Although alcohol consumption has been declining since the early 1990's, a number of social consequences of alcohol abuse have not disappeared. There are still many homes that struggle with massive alcoholism. Over a period of years (from the 1970's and onwards) there have been a series of violent episodes on Greenland in the form of assaults and murder of family members and friends. The average age of those committing these crimes has declined in recent years, as quite young boys are now also threatening or engaging in dangerous and violent behavior. On Greenland, it has come to be that a large percentage of young men have trouble finding a socially accepted position. The young men are responsible for much of the violence, abuse and suicide in the society (Bjerregaard et al., 1995) and are, furthermore, more prone to mental disorders (Lynge, 2000). In the years 1990-1999, 527 people committed suicide on Greenland. 432 of these were men and 95 were women (Leine Weber, Bjerregaard & Voestermans, 2001). Suicide among young people has been shown to be connected with problems in social relationships, e.g. in the upbringing, in homes with alcohol abuse problems and other conflicts, and in the relationship with partners that are often characterised by violence and conflict. Marginalization is seen as a major cause of suicide in this context. Studies have also shown that around one third of the men who have had serious suicidal thoughts, have not discussed it with others. Leineweber et al. (2001, p. 287) writes:

*“Being disconnected from community and family ties seems to increase the vulnerability of young people, especially when faced with a stressful experience, such as the loss of a significant relationship. In future studies the role of social networks and family life should be of central interest.”*

A number of epidemiological studies showing the extent of well-being and problems of children in school (Pedersen, 1997; Curtis et al., 1997, Curtis et al., 2006; Dahl-Petersen, 2006) have been conducted. The Poppel (2007) study on living conditions and well-being suggests that people in Greenland experience a strong need to strengthen the upbringing environment of their children and create safe communities, confirming the results of both the aforementioned SLICA and the

results of the interview-series conducted by Mikkelsen. At the same time, the study also shows a strong support for values such as solidarity, respect for nature, and caring for children. Although these values were considered quite widespread in the community, the respondents still felt a need to promote them further. One could say, that there was a difference in how much the value were appreciated and how much they were actually practiced in the community. The municipal meetings and interviews in Paamiut have revealed a set of locally treasured values:

- *Ability to support oneself*
- *Openness, curiosity, and hospitality*
- *Ownership of programmes and development*
- *Respect towards people, objects and nature*
- *Violence is not accepted under any circumstances*
- *Development over adaptation*
- *Sense of community*

In general, values represent a resource, and can be thought of as complementary images to the descriptions of problems. Creating different complementary images is quite consistent with a declaration from the First Nations in Canada. The declaration affirms how weary the communities have grown of researchers documenting everything that is wrong; such as suicide, neglect, alcohol abuse, domestic violence, poor nutrition, and economic problems. Instead, the idea is to supplement this kind of research with research on how local communities have actually survived the colonial era and its effects, how they have kept their children alive, preserved ancient narratives and ceremonies, retained knowledge of how to survive in the wild, and kept the fireplace warm with hope for the following generations (Ball, 2005: 86). *Paamiut Asasara* acknowledges this, and wishes to contribute to diverse research on the field.

## **6. Change and Research**

The programme *Paamiut Asasara* inaugurates a series of locally based initiatives to improve the quality of life for everyone, including the vulnerable groups in the community. This is done in a manner which is consistent with the participatory approach, as recommended in the aforementioned IASC guideline (see Bolton et al., 2002; Bragin, 2005). This means that every aspect of the programme is implemented in a way that ensures everyone's influence and opportunity to participate. It is at the core of the programme, through community mobilization and prevention efforts, to create commendable opportunities for participation and quality of life, in ways that counteract marginalization, exclusion, and unequal opportunities.

The documentation and research included in the programme must also be organized in a manner that promotes opportunities for active participation, as well as local control over the process and the results. It must ensure that all voices are heard and that the research process in this way

follows and promotes respect for universal human rights (as they are described in United Nations declarations, conventions, and reports). Consequently, it was decided to organize the documentation and research on the basis of community psychological approaches, operationalized in a participatory action research framework.

### **The Research Council**

A *Research Council* has been established in Paamiut. The task of the Council is to assess any research taking place in the programme. E.g. Ph.D. programmes and Master Program theses attached to *Paamiut Asasara*. The Research Council will decide on the relevance of proposed research and assess the ethical aspects of these. This is done on the basis of a presentation and discussion of each research programme in its different parts; the research questions, the method of data collection, the analysis, and the dissemination of results. If the programme is approved, the research council will contribute with ideas and reflections on method and content. It is an important criterion for the approval of programmes, that they are transparent and have a clear relevance for the population as a whole. As a consequence, much of the proposed research is inspired by community-psychological research.

The Research Council has discussed and formulated guidelines for research including a number of research principles:

1. Choice of research programmes is a joint process between researchers and representatives of stakeholders in Paamiut and any other partners involved.
2. Choices of methods are made on the basis of what is seen as relevant and applicable in Paamiut.
3. Fewer resources should be spent on descriptive research, and more should be spent on research, which examines changes, improvements, and sustainability.
4. To the extent possible, researchers need to be involved in the process and practical implementation ("Hands On").
5. The research should be organized in a manner that ensures that it is transparent, understandable, and relevant to all participating in the process - and it must be directly applicable to the community.
6. The research should include a significant element of innovation in terms of selection and development of methodology.

The research will demonstrate whether, how, and to what extent the strategies and interventions are helpful in achieving the desired five subsidiary goals, as defined above (e.g. p. 2).

To our knowledge, there are no studies that encompass as many factors as the *Paamiut Asasara* programme. As mentioned above (cf. page 2) the study embraces as different areas as business

(economics), school development, housing development, crime prevention, abuse prevention, improved communication between the citizens and the public system, and increased efforts to help children, adolescents, and families.

There is a great need for this kind of wide scale intervention and the comprehensive analysis thereof – due to the fact that we still lack concrete knowledge about how to improve living conditions for vulnerable families. More specifically, there is a lack of knowledge as to how a locally defined action towards the elimination of child neglect will work.

The research purposes in *Paamiut Asasara* are closely linked to the overall objectives of the programme. The programme vision is to build a greater sense of joint responsibility and ownership among all citizens of Paamiut and the external partners in the programme. The goal is to let the physical and economic improvements go hand in hand with the psychological, cultural, and spiritual mobilization.

The shape of the programme contributes to a high degree of involvement of the citizens and prepares the possibility for simultaneous responsibility, solidarity, and appreciation in the community. It seems to be a prerequisite for the programme, that beneficiaries and key stakeholders want to participate in programme activities, and it is crucial for the programme that all significant voices are heard. In this way, the resources of citizens are mobilized, hereby giving them the opportunity to contribute to the development of the programme with their experiences and to develop common local knowledge and networks together.

In close collaboration with the community and its internal and external resources *Paamiut Asasara* seeks to:

- Propose and develop evaluation and documentation methods,
- Demonstrate the effectiveness of interventions implemented,
- Disseminate knowledge, results, and methods back into the community, as well as to relevant companies and political bodies.