Identifying Strategies to Improve WIC Participation in Rural Native Communities

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Healthy Eating Research

Background

- Native American participation in WIC declined by 40% from 2006-2018.[1]

- The purpose of this study was to:
  - Understand dynamic factors that affect participation in three tribally-administered WIC programs
  - Identify feasible intervention points in the system.

Methods

- In-depth qualitative interviews with key stakeholders (n=37) in 3 communities* including:
  - Current/former WIC participants
  - Eligible non-participants
  - Tribal WIC staff
  - Food store managers
  - Tribal health administrators
- Transcripts were inductively coded
- Emergent themes were identified by determining causal links and polarity between key variables.[2]
- Word-and-arrow diagrams synthesized into a causal loop diagram.[2]

*Data presented here are from <u>one</u> of the three study communities (n=11 interviews).

References

1. USDA www.fns.usda.gov/pd/wic-program.
2. Kim et al. *Syst Dyn Rev.* 2012; 28: 311–328
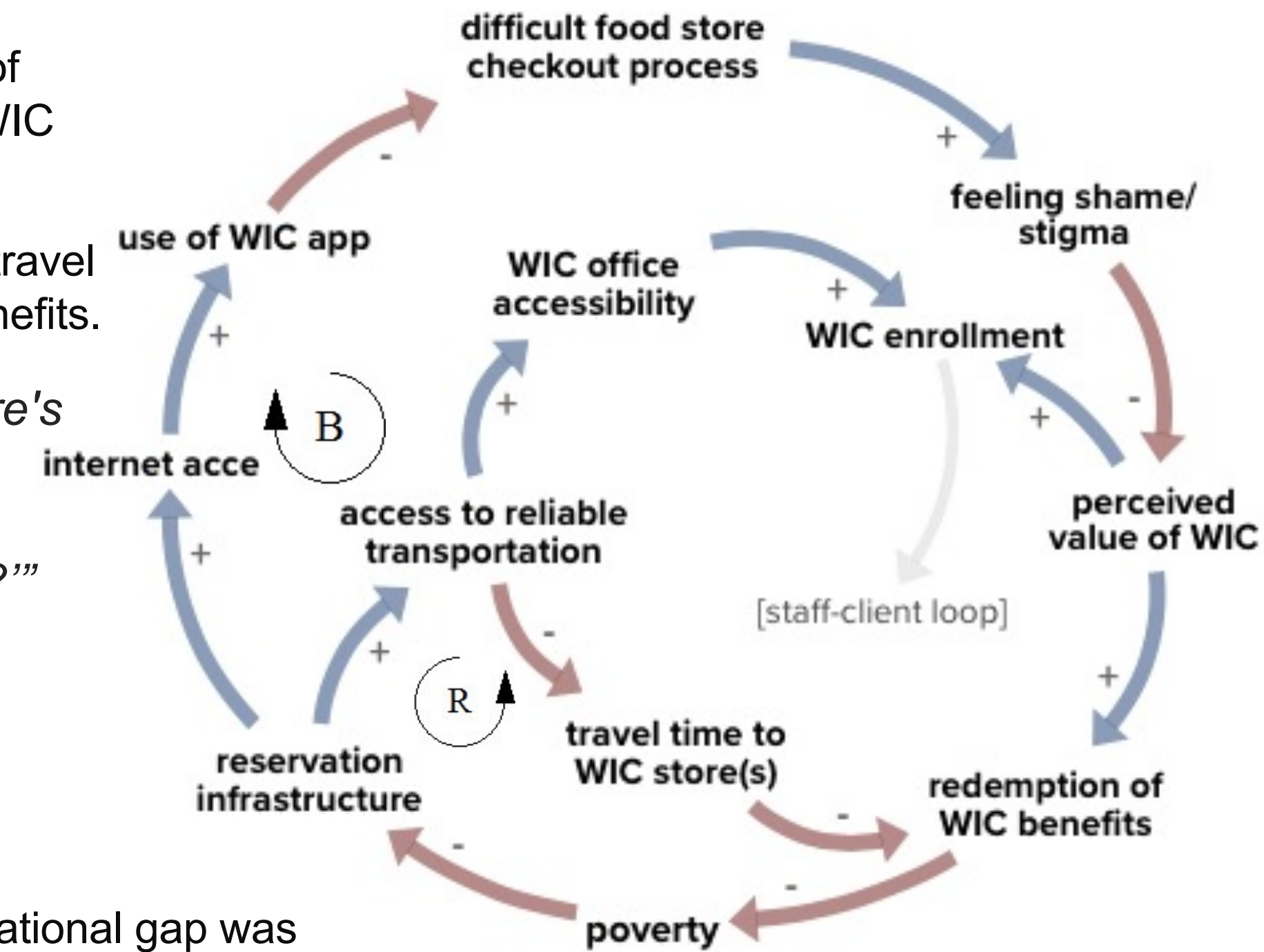
Results & Data Visualization

Shown here are two emergent themes and corresponding feedback loops that affect WIC participation, taken from a larger synthesized CLD

1. Community infrastructure impacts redemption of WIC benefits

- A difficult food store checkout process caused feelings of shame and stigma, decreasing the perceived value of WIC and redemption of WIC benefits.

- Access to reliable transportation impacted participants' travel time to WIC store(s), decreasing redemption of WIC benefits.

"It's frustrating, because during the pandemic there's crazy lines and you don't want to hold up people, and sometimes my husband will be like 'Ugh... do we really have to go back [to get a different item]?'"
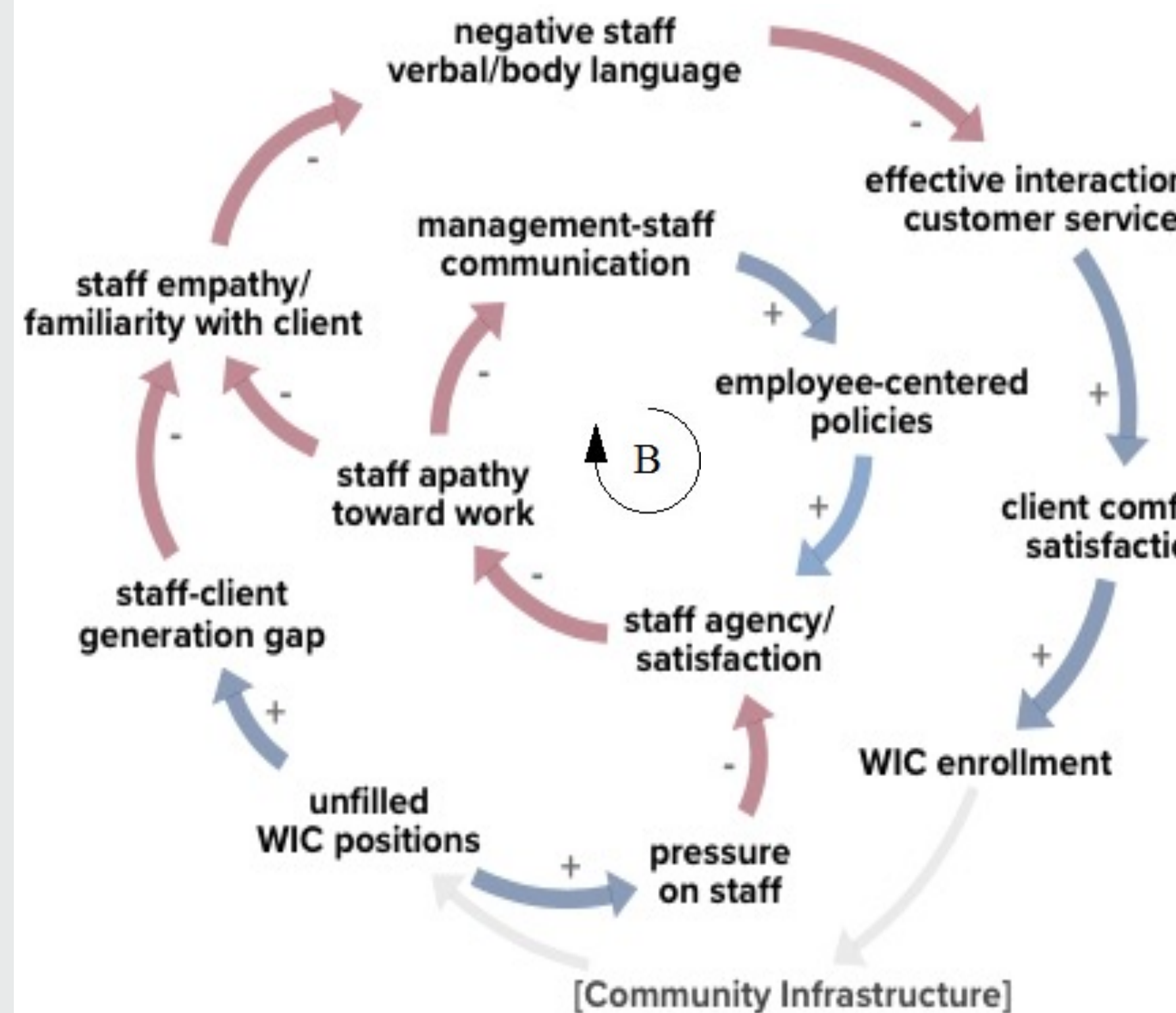
-WIC participant

2. Staff-client relationships impact client satisfaction

- A large staff-client generational gap was perceived by staff and clients as a barrier to effective interactions.

- When employee-centered policies were not in place to support staff agency & satisfaction, WIC staff felt a sense of apathy toward their work, which impacted their interactions with clients.

"I mean if we did [an outreach] event it would bring back a lot of families, bring their documents back in, but [WIC] management won't take that into consideration."

-WIC staff

Implications

Potential points of intervention:

- Enhance internet infrastructure and accessibility to facilitate use of the WIC app and improve participant shopping experience

- Improve staff-client relationships by providing training that facilitates WIC staff-management communication and increases staff agency and satisfaction.

Acknowledgements