

## Literature Review on Understanding Community Psychology as a Global Change Agent in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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**ABSTRACT:** Community Psychology is not only becoming a predominant subject in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, but also a change agent in both public and private sector. If any meaningful change is to take place in a community, it calls for an understanding of Community Psychology. Community Psychology provokes decision makers a call to action, to reach out and do something about their organization situation. This change can either be initiated from within or outside the affected community. This paper extrapolates five aspects relating to the application of community psychological tools in the community. First, defines Community, Community problem and explains what community change is. Secondly, it defines Community Psychology, themes and values of Community Psychology. Thirdly, it highlights the understanding of the community challenge. Fourth, it explains the concept of power in the community. Fifth, it discusses the application of the concepts of Community Psychology and lobbying for change in the community.

**KEYWORDS:** Community, Community Psychology, Community Challenge, and lobbying for change

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Date of Submission: 02-06-2019

Date of acceptance: 18-06-2019

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Community is defined as a group of individuals who have something in common that connects them and distinguishes them from other groups. Communities may be large or small, may be temporary or long-term, may have commonalities such as place, activity, ethnic identification, job, etc. Members of the community work toward a common goal or pursue mutual benefits for the community, and have a sense of belonging (Homan, 2016).

A problem can be described as a need that is not being adequately met, causing discomfort for an individual. A community problem can be described as a common need in a community that is not being adequately met, causing discomfort and for several members of the community, and affecting the general well-being of the community. A community problem may be viewed as a condition which blocks or hinders community development. A community problem may also be seen as an invitation to change or action, when one views the problem as the distance between where the community is now and where they wish to be, recognizing the current unwanted conditions and the better, future condition. For example, a community problem could be that of overpopulation, economic crisis, illiteracy, malnutrition, obesity, conflicts, etc. (Homan, 2016).

Global community change is the process of producing modification or innovation in attitudes, policies or practice in the community for the purpose of reducing or eliminating community problems, providing for general improvement in the way needs are met and developing assets for the benefit of the community members. In brief, community change means community improvement. Community change can occur through community development, where community members recognize their assets and discover how to use them in more productive ways (Homan, 2016).

### II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study used the literature review methodological approach. Some of the reviews include an article which was published in 2017 in the journal Psychology in Society which focuses on the theory and practice of psychology in the Southern African context. The authors of this article are from various institutions in Zimbabwe which is one of the countries in Southern Africa. Additionally, the thrust of the review is from one of the key text books in Community Psychology entitled, “Promoting Community Change: Making it Happen in the Real World,” by Homan. Furthermore, a larger portion of global social issues affecting communities worldwide have been extracted from “Social Justice Handbook: Small Steps to a Better World,” (Cannon, 2009).

### III. DEFINITION, THEMES AND VALUES OF COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY

The review of the journal by MpikelleloMpawusi Maseko et..al 2017 defines “Community psychology as the study of understanding people within their worlds and using the same understanding to improve their wellbeing”. Further, MpikelleloMpawusi Maseko and others state that understanding community psychology “is to understand the underlying principles and values that govern how situations are constructed.”

Major themes in the field of Community Psychology include ecological metaphor, seeking mode, assets based approach and prevention. The ecological metaphor represents community psychology as a “public health” approach to mental problems, shifting the focus from individuals in distress to the ‘sickness’ of communities. The seeking mode emphasises seeking to understand how problems have been generated, what needs exist in the community, and which of them are currently being met. The assets based approach is a theme in Community Psychology that seeks to study the strengths and virtues that enable individuals and communities to thrive. The goal and focus of prevention theme in Community Psychology is to modify “those processes that lead to the emergence of maladaptation so as to reduce the onset of target problems”(MpikelleloMpawusi Maseko et..al 2017, 69-70).

Four key values which are integral to Community Psychology are social justice, empowerment and liberation, psychological sense of community, and respect for diversity. By seeking social justice, community psychology aims to uplift and afford privileges to marginalised groups. Other values such as equality, respect, democracy, autonomy, and peace are linked to justice. Empowerment suggests a distinct approach for developing interventions and creating social change by drawing attention towards health, adaptation and natural helping system. It is an approach that focuses on the positives and enhancing wellbeing...focusing on strengths and competency building.” A ‘sense of community’ is a powerful and emotional force that increases quality of life and is critical to both individual and collective wellbeing. Individuals inherently have a need for belonging, and people are attracted to communities in which they feel influential, share commonly held ideas that can be pursued through involvement in the community and sense of belonging. Community psychology views diversity within a community as an asset (MpikelleloMpawusi Maseko et..al 2017, 70-73).

Further, Community Psychology concerns the relationships of individuals with communities and societies at the intra-psychic, interpersonal, organizational, cultural, and political levels. Community Psychology is based on neither the individual nor the community but on their linkage. Community psychology, therefore finds more use for some methods for transversal knowledge and epistemic diversity (MpikelleloMpawusi Maseko et..al 2017, 74).”

Given an example of Zimbabwe, Community Psychology is more compatible with the African worldview. “African scholars regard African concepts of the individual and self to be almost totally dependent on and subordinate to social entities and cultural processes. When this inclination is juxtaposed with community psychology’s ecological and contextual perspective makes the discipline of Community Psychology germane in African contexts.” Community psychology praxis “does not assume that communities are blank slates but rather communities are seen as the experts with practitioners acting as collaborators.” What the global village needs are Community Psychology practitioners who are context-sensitive, who view Africans “not as a tabula rasa but as people who do have values and indigenous knowledge systems” and “will not necessarily seek to “solve” Africa’s problems but would rather seek to help communities attain existential realities. Community psychology practitioners should be facilitators, encouraging Africans to discover and implement creative, sustainable, indigenous solutions in their communities.

#### **IV. UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY CHALLENGE**

Community Psychology provides technical know-how of understanding community challenges. According to Zuccino, D. (1997) what is seen as a problem can vary from place to place, and from group to group in the same place. Although there may be variations regarding community challenges, Community Psychologists are involved in identifying those challenges through research and community consultation, and then assisting the community in creating an atmosphere conducive to positive change. While each local community may have different challenges, globally there are several challenges that affect the entire universe.

One of the global community challenge is poverty. According to Zuccino, David (1997) a third of Americans believe that poverty is caused by lack of effort, a third believe that it is caused by circumstances, and the remaining third believe that it results from a combination of both. Overall those living in lower income brackets are more likely to see poverty as a result of circumstances Oscar Lewis (1966). In Africa, the issue of poverty is a pervasive especially in eSwatini, with USAID reporting in 2018 that 70% of the population live in poverty (USAID website, accessed April, 2019). While poverty is a difficult problem, it is a symptom of deeper root causes. There are systemic inequalities in the culture and economic system in eSwatini that are major contributors to the poverty of the country (Moore, 2007). According to William R. (1971) provides the opposing view that social problems are not caused by individual as but the society and that lower class people are not offenders but rather the victims and scapegoats.

Another community challenge is according to Grenn Firebaugh and Kenneth Davis, (1988) is prejudice and discrimination are often treated as synonym in every day speech but they are equally distinct. Thus prejudice refers to attitudes and discrimination reflects behavior. The distinction between attitude and action is a crucial one. Prejudice is a community problem because is a rigid predisposition to respond to a given group in a particular way.

It is in fact a prejudgment in which only selected facts are emphasized while other are ignored or de-emphasized. Implicitly prejudice assumes the superiority of some and inferiority of other. Prejudice can take a form of stereotyping in which everyone in group is given the same characteristics. People who are prejudiced cling to their stereotypes emotionally, and inflexibly; they are unlikely to be open to me information. On the other hand classic definition by William Robin Jr. states (1947) that discrimination may be said to exist to the degree that individuals of a given group who are otherwise formally qualified are not treated in conformity with these nominally universal institutionalized codes. In other words discrimination is unfavorable treatment of a group on arbitrary grounds.

Further, another global community challenge is social justice and human rights issues are at the core of most of the community problems listed above. Homan states, "At the heart of all our work is social justice." (Homan, 2016, 61) writes that this community challenge is a "social justice warrior. Cannon says, "Faith in action – that is what justice is all about... Justice is the manifestation of right action. Simply put, the basic concepts of work (or action) and faith (or righteousness) help lay the foundation for what God has to say about justice. Throughout the Scriptures justice and righteousness go hand in hand." (Cannon, 2009, 19) So, as believers practice good works, responding to the needs of others, they become agents of justice in their communities (Butrin, 2010, 85). Cannon advocates Chief Executives of organizations to move beyond compassion" by asking the simple question, "Why?" Why are people poor? Why are people hungry? Why are people homeless? Why are children dropping out of school? Cannon says that compassion is "easier", and that "Justice is harder, more costly and more painful, but with farther reaching affects." (Cannon, 2009, 35). Leaders who have conscious must be willing to step out of our comfort zones, step into the story of the oppressed, learn from them and walk alongside them in identifying the root causes of their challenges, then assisting them in overcoming those challenges.

Additionally, gender based violence and sexual harassment is another challenge in communities which operate against a backdrop of violence fueled by men's romance over women in the work place, schools and institutional settings. Sexual harassment is unwelcome verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that affects the recipients work conditions or contributes to hostile environment. Although the precise incidence of sexual harassment is difficult to determine. One survey found out that four out of ten women reported having encountered some form of sexual harassment and half of men survey reported they have engaged in verbal or physical behavior that could be defined as sexual harassment Elizabeth kolbert (1991). Victims of sexual harassment are more likely to be female than male.

In Africa, it is reported that gender based violence is a persistent challenge in eSwatini, along with gender discrimination against women. A UN report states that 1 in 3 females in eSwatini report some sort of sexual abuse by the age of 18, and 48% of women report having experienced some form of sexual violence in their lifetime (<https://eswatini.unfpa.org/en/topics/gender-based-violence-2>, accessed June 9, 2019). Women in Swaziland occupy a subordinate role in society. Traditional customary law classifies women as "minors" in all legal affairs, preventing them from registering property in their own names or opening a bank account without a male relative guarantor. (US State Dept. 2018 Human Rights Report, 14).

Furthermore, another community challenge is domestic violence. Murray A. Straus (1980), the study of domestic violence found that one-sixth of addicted to having encountered a lot of family violence. Family violence affects the entire family. This violence refers to anything from a single push to a repeated pattern of beatings that caused injury. Straus estimate that approximately 6 percent of marriages involves serious violence such as beatings, punching, biting, and kicking. Attempt to prohibit family violence by legislation have had a little impact and will likely continue to be ineffective due to myths and worldviews that promote the vice.

Various communities also face the problem alcoholism. Alcoholic is commonly defined as one whose drinking produces serious personal social or healthy consequences such as marital problems, occupational difficulties, accidents arrests marc a. Schuck T. (1989) intently to choose whether to stop or not an alcoholic thus is unable to choose whether he or she will drink or not and is unable consider. As a disease alcoholism has unique characteristics of having no agrees upon cause, no agreed upon medical treatment and no knowledge of cure. As a result it is treated as a mental disorder so it is primarily regarded as a biological medical one Green Firebaugh and Kenneth Davis (1988).

The HIV/AIDS epidemic is another problem adversely affecting communities globally. The burden of HIV infection and disease continues to increase in many developing countries. With an adult infection rate approaching 30%, the poor health of farm workers has negatively impacted food production in eSwatini. (AVERT.org website, accessed April, 2019). With the deaths of so many adults from HIV/AIDS, the numbers

of orphans and vulnerable children is rising daily in eSwatini. A 2013 study by Janine Braithwaite for UNICEF reported that over 20% of children in eSwatini have lost at least one parent to HIV/AIDS (2013, 11). The loss of adults of working age has significantly depleted the experienced workforce, contributing to economic instability in the country. Thus, there is a need for local approaches to the global problem of managing HIV disease. The most pressing public health challenges are to use existing knowledge of strategies to reduce HIV transmission, and to apply them in ways appropriate to the local situation, and to develop, evaluate and implement interventions to prolong healthy life in those already infected.

## **V. THE CONCEPT OF POWER IN THE COMMUNITY**

For Community Psychologists to bring the necessary change in communities, there is need for the understanding of who holds power. Further, Community Psychologists need to understand the power bases and the type of power to use to their advantage. According to (Homan, 2016), power is the capacity to move people in a desired direction to accomplish some goal. Community Leaders hold legitimate power because they have influence on the people under their control. Opinion Leaders hold power because they influence attitudes or actions of other person informally. They offer informal advice about the product or service. Opinion leaders are part of the social groups. They have social communication network. The communication is informal and interpersonal in nature which happens between those who are not associated with the commercial selling source directly (Homan, 2016).

Another group of people who hold power are motivators. These are the people that have courage to keep going even when things do not make sense. And they will motivate the other to keep going with them until a goal is reached. These people are very important because there in any life endeavor there are always time that progress seems slow or impossible in such situations motivators will always give hope. People with Special Skills also hold power in communities. These people hold power based on their skills. They are able to influence people into action. Their power is expert based and therefore they are authorities in their field. This cause people that surround them to fall under their power. Political Leaders also have power in communities because they hold political and elected positions and contributes much in policies making their examples being, members of parliament, counsellors. In most cases by the virtue of holding the positions a special kind of power is incurred on them (Homan, 2016). According to Homan (2016), there are several bases of power most common in communities. The larger the community, the less likely control over a particular power base will be concentrated in a few hands. Thus the power bases keep in mind that a person must be willing to use the power base to be meaningful. Some of the power bases common in communities:

The first base of power in communities are individuals with information. Mondross, J., & Wilson, S. (1994), state that those who control the symbol of information and interpretation of those symbols are likely to be among the most influential individuals. Possession of knowledge and the ability to control what other people know gives tremendous advantages. Information is currency of tactical action. People who have a lot more information than others certainly have clear perception of what they need to do. In an information age those who control the symbols of information and interpretation of those symbols are likely to be among the most influential.

The second base for power are individuals with money. Money provides single access to other things. Thus those having money can buy much of what they want. Most people want money thus to get the money they have to go to people with money. This create a dependency syndrome and in exchange those with money control the poor and community decisions or policies Mondross, J., & Wilson, S. (1994). Third individual with knowledge in law also has a power base. The ability to make interpret and enforce policies governing the community confers a great power and authority to them. Determining the laws and policies determine who wins the game of power. Example of people in this base includes lawyers and members of the legislature. Fourth, the constituencies have the ability to influence the lives. The behavior of large groups of people provides significant power in a community. This includes power over the people in a group as well as power over the individuals. Example of people in this group is major employer, and community organizations, business men, religious leaders, local political leaders (Homan, 2016).

Fifth, individuals with goods and commodities also have the power in communities. The more one has these commodities the more he has power over those that do not have these people automatically are followed by the poor. Sixth, individuals with networking participation have the power base because they readily access to resources and have an ability to mobilize people through person's reputation and influence. Seventh, individuals with special personality have the power base. According to Dale, D., & Mitiguy, N. (1978), some people have personality manner that attract enthusiasm support and respect like magnet. They project a sense of purpose and confidence among others. The atmosphere created determines the success and personality that is instrumental and influential in the community.

### **Using Power to Bring Change in the Communities**



As a community psychologist, it is not good to use dominance as a way to bring change in communities. Collaboration is the way the other way to use power. It is possible for a leader to powerfully participate with other parties to create mutually acceptable solutions even parties whose interest are different or in apparent conflict with their leader. It is possible to combine power with that of the other group to bring solution even with the parties that have divergent views.

Power can be used to force an opponent to end exploitive or destructive practices and create a new understanding of things in others. Power should make things happen without manipulation. It is not important to be upset with how things are happening but make sure that power is maintained in a proper use without manipulation. Power does not even require a struggle or a fight though it's how it is often conceived of. It is unfortunate that people are sometimes forced to do something they don't want to do. Power can be used in a spirit of cooperation as easily as it can occur in a climate of conflict. It is simply and importantly the necessary element that provides impetus in the process of making things different. Thus it can be used to dignify or demean depends on the user (Homan, 2016).

The focus on community power building realizes vision of promoting collaborative, community-based efforts that build the power and influence of those with the least access to opportunity. For one to build power in a community the following has to be considered; (1) Putting yourself at a power loop by placing oneself in a position to be known, positively regarded by people with known and positively regarded by people with influence in a community to easily affect the community decisions and use the new relationships to assist in the effort of bringing community change. (2) Using solid information which assures a person measure of credibility. People tend to give more weight to the words of someone who knows what is talking about. That's therefore it is prominent to know in depth the problem and solutions for the problem you want to change. (3) Acting powerfully sets a stage for action and how one acts influences the immediate progress of events. Regardless of the strategy one chooses creating fundamental s should be observed to use and maintain personal power (Homan, 2016).

(4) Building a culture of solidarity is another base of power - human rights enable people to see their individual struggles as systemic problems with common roots that can be addressed together, and connect people's values to broader, unifying principles that can guide our efforts towards justice. We build power when we forge bonds with people sharing the same experiences, create bridges between different struggles, and establish pathways for collectively participating in institutional decision-making (Dale, D., & Mitiguy, N., 1978). (5) Developing collective action is another way to build power which requires communities to organize as well as to be aligned with one another across the struggles at hand. To achieve this in a sustainable way, there are six key practices: building permanent organization, developing leaders, applying a value-based framework (e.g. human rights), communicating strategically, holding power holders accountable, and actively creating an alignment of disparate social efforts. (6) Creating participatory and accountable systems is another way to build power where a leader must demand new systems of both private and public accountability to basic rights and standards for workers and communities. To add, there must be a democratization of economy with more collective planning and decision-making grounded in human rights; and must also strengthen political democracy from very basic voting rights to creating more participatory and direct democratic institutions (Homan, 2016).

## **VI. APPLICATION OF COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY AND LOBBYING FOR CHANGE**

In order to bring the necessary change in communities, Homan suggests practical Community Psychology theoretical frameworks for change to be realistic globally. These Community Psychology fundamental principles provide a "frame for understanding how you can promote action to change conditions that affect people" in the community (Homan, 2016, 37). The author suggests that through organized action, one person can make a difference. He gives several theories and organisational models to help a community psychology practitioner develop and initiate efforts to promote change.

Homan begins with systems theory, which describes an organisation or a community as a system which is receiving constant input from several sources, and is attempting to maintain equilibrium within itself. Maintaining a reciprocal relationship between the system and the environment is crucial to this equilibrium. Systems operate in relationship to other systems and subsystems, so that there are varying degrees of influence on the system. A system will take action when it gets out of balance, and each action may affect its environment or other related systems. Homan states that "...what happens in any part of the system affects the entire system, and what occurs outside the system can also affect the system" (Homan, 2016).

Homan further presents chaos theory as another model for change. The theory states that a small change can have a large consequence, especially when a system is interacting with other systems. The community psychology practitioner should have an understanding of these theories in order to predict possible outcomes of any proposed community change, no matter how small the change (Homan, 2016).

Homan then discusses three ways to organise people in communities in order to facilitate change. In the first case, "people come together to solve a particular problem or make a particular improvement." This is usually a

short term, limited scope action, but one which leaves the community in a more empowered condition. The second case is when “people come together for the purpose of developing or asserting their own power or capacity.” This usually involves a broader agenda, and seeks to build the capacity of individuals in the group while the group pursues a community change. The third case involves community development, in which the ultimate goal is to provide for the enrichment of all members of the community.

According to Homan, community development is about three things: “...increasing the capability of a community to act effectively, increasing the number and usefulness of community assets to benefit its members, and ensuring that members of the community own the process and the results” (Homan, 2016, 60-61).

Homan advocates blending community development activities with social action in order to strengthen communities. In order to do this, when proposing community development activities, the practitioner must ask some important questions about the proposed activity. For example; what community conditions does the project intend to change? Will the project identify and build upon existing community assets? Does the project build the skills of community members? Does the project produce new leaders and new teachers? Who owns the project, and makes decisions regarding the project? If an outsider, is there a process in place to transfer ownership of the project to the community members? Are there other pertinent questions to be addressed in order to ensure that a project is truly a community project?(Homan, 2016).

### **Lobbying for Community Change**

Lobbying for change involves contacting legislators and trying to convince them to support or reject a policy. A good example can be when one meets with representatives with an attempt to elicit a policy change. Lobbying is a crucial part of any advocacy group looking to make a change and involves influencing the people in power who can effect these changes. As with every stage of an advocacy campaign, lobbying too needs to be planned strategically to exert the right kind of pressure on your representatives and gain a favorable outcome. Lobbyists mainly resort to two types: direct or indirect lobbying (Homan, 2016).

Techniques under direct lobbying involves face to face: The most powerful technique for direct lobbying is a face-to-face meeting because you can directly talk about the issues affecting your interests and the policies which can help better these situations. However, for this to work, it is necessary to first build a working relationship with the particular legislator. Another technique is making phone calls: This is mainly done if you're working under time constraints. While on a call, be concise and firm and explain what the particular problem is, and how a policy can alleviate the issue. Ask where your representative stands on the issue and request action. Another approach is sending emails and letters. Similar to phone calls, it is necessary for your email to be direct and concise, with a clear subject line so that it doesn't get ignored. Ask questions and request specific action; talking about how the action. Using influential constituents is another direct lobbying technique would be to get influential constituents to meet, call or email representatives as their words would certainly carry weight(Homan, 2016).

Indirect Lobbying involves raising awareness with grassroots about issues which advocacy group wants to rectify and they use this as a channel to influence the lawmakers' stance. Another techniques under indirect lobbying is using media outreach to create impact regarding a bill or a policy. This includes making use of print, television, and online channels such as social media to influence people to make a stand. Mobilizing people is another way which involves organizing rallies, boycotts, or agitations for or against an issue. This is an effective tool as it garners intense media attention and puts pressure on policymakers. Using opinion polls is another method where opinion polls are used to cast attention on legislators' decisions. Lobbying is a threefold process from a strategy spanning before, during, and post your meeting so that it maximizes your lobbying efforts. J. Erlich, J. & Tropman, J. (1989) stress that lobbying can be a very useful tool to advocacy group or an individual constituent in reaching targets.

## **VII. CONCLUSION**

Community psychology is there to improve the wellbeing of an individual and wellbeing of the community. Community Psychological theories and principles have greater impact of changing global communities. However, for these theories to be realistic, there is need to understand community challenges and context. Additionally, it is fundamental requirement for Community Psychologists to have lobbying techniques. Community Psychology provides skills and techniques of bringing the necessary change to the communities. Positive change brings about healthy communities. When communities are healthy, they function better in meeting their needs of its members resulting in the health of individuals. As the saying goes, no man is an island. People are interrelated and so are communities. When there is positive change in the individual, it benefits the community and the same is true of interdependent communities. Therefore, Community Psychology is there to bring change not only to individuals but also to the well-being of the global community.

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MabvutoFitta Chipeta " Literature Review on Understanding Community Psychology as a Global Change Agent in the 21st Century" *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI)*, vol. 08, no. 6, 2019, pp.38-44