

Community
participation
importance in
community
psychology



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Discuss with relevant examples the importance of community participation in community psychology.

1. Introduction

“ Rather than just reacting to a problem or issue and finding means with which to treat it, the ideal approach would be to identify ways to minimize or prevent the problem from ever occurring” Erika Sanborne (2002)

Definition of Community Psychology

Community Psychology is a new discipline that is concerned with the relationship of individuals with communities and societies which integrates research and action to understand and enhance quality of life for Individuals, Communities and Societies (Kloos, B. et al 2012: 14-16). The increasing need for this discipline stems from the limitations presented by other related disciplines such as Clinical Psychology that placed emphasis on the mental health of the individual and deals with the individual mental and social problems. In contrast to this approach, Community Psychology focuses not only on the individual person, their competence and ability, but rather on the wider context of their lives (source). (source)..... states that community psychology perspective is constructional rather than pathological in orientation, by this the psychologist meant that focus is on root causes of the psychological problems other than the consequences. This shift centers on two underlying assumptions; how do problems arise? How can change occur? (Kloos, B. et al (2012: 15). This assumption further conceptualizes the importance of persons and contexts; context is defined as the sum

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environment within which an individual lives. This understanding underpins on the belief that no man is an island, by this the understanding is that an individual relates with his or her community at multiple levels which include the family, network of friends, workplace, school, voluntary associations, neighborhood and wider locality that includes culture, gender, beliefs and norms that the community ascribes to. As such consideration should be placed on understanding the link between mental health problems that may arise due to this interaction and environmental factors that may contribute to the problem. (source) exemplified this and stated that individual may bring values to the workgroup that may change the thinking of the workgroup or may be influenced or affected by group norms and values. Therefore the total influence that the environment has on the individual is what defines the purpose for the existence of community psychology. By definition community psychology centres on understanding how the environment which can be also be termed a surrounding or geographic location of an individual (source) or the social and psychological relations of belonging and identity (source) as defined by Community Psychologists has significance in community psychology.

This description of the community as social and psychological relations of belonging; entails not only the influence that this environment has on the individual but also how an individual can influence it. Relate this to ecological description in community psychology.

(source) states that Community Psychologists understand the deep rooted social and mental health problems, the structural forces that shape the lives of the individual, the power dynamics in individual relationships, <https://assignbuster.com/community-participation-importance-in-community-psychology/>

organisations and communities, the multiple relationships of individuals and how it affects him or her and works to promote individual growth and prevent social and mental health problems before they arise. At the centre of Community Psychologists is the people themselves; therefore people's participation or community participation is key to community psychology. The preceding paragraph will define community participation and how it relates to community psychology.

Defining Community Participation

Community participation means taking part in an initiative without really being its instigator or leader (source). It also means the process through which people take an active and influential hand in shaping decisions that affect their lives.

Relationship with community psychology

The relationship between community psychology and community participation is two pronged. Firstly the community psychologist uses the community as its unit of analysis or the level of analysis, hence the two cannot be separated. As already described above; community psychology is rooted in the understanding of the relationship between individual and communities and societies; this means that the work of a Community Psychologist relies on the community itself; in other schools of thought community psychology is described as community work (Source); community psychology interventions are aptly placed in the community; in non-clinical settings (source);

As stated by (source) community Psychologist aim at identifying ways and means to minimize or prevent problem from ever occurring; at the same time developing the wellbeing of the people in the community and their quality of life. At the epicenter of defining problems and devising solutions is the people themselves; or as it can be termed otherwise the community itself. This therefore calls for the active involvement of the people to take charge of the situation and influence change.

Importance of community participation in community psychology

One of the major principles of community psychology is citizen participation, citizen participation as defined by (source) is the

Apart from citizen participation, community participation is also important in community psychology because it promotes utilization of indigenous knowledge. It is stated that community members are the true experts of their own situation; it is absurd to think otherwise. Community psychology application are aptly placed in the community in non-clinical settings (Snaborne, E. 2012: 2) because of its nature of focus on the community; the participation of the community is key as it draws experience and expertise from within.

The use of community knowledge leads to the formulation of interventions that are responsive in nature; interventions that focus on the prevention approach which is ideal in community psychology.

Community participation also leads to power sharing which is one of the principles of community psychology. Power sharing can only be achieved by

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getting the community involved and removing the 'us and them' syndrome. Eliminating the status differential between experts and those served by experts can only happen when the community is involved.

In genuinely recognizing the community members as true experts of their situation, the community intervention that result will be based on needs identified by community members themselves, structured by their participation and contribution, evaluated by their perception of change and thus lending the interventions community owned and sustainable.

Social justice

Development experts like community psychologists now recognize that citizen participation is an entitlement or a right. A right is a privilege, privilege is a special advantage, an immunity, a permission to benefit which is granted to individual to be enjoyed. This school of thought is enshrined in the most development policies. Therefore granting such privilege through participation allows citizens to use this indelible social resource to maximum use. It is also stressed that community psychologist help communities cope with negative situations, therefore allowing them utilize this privilege; the social resource bestowed upon them naturally allows them deal with stressors which could otherwise contribute to much negative situation if not well tackled. Community participation therefore is important in community psychology as it allows experts invest in communities through resources that are readily available. Community participation is also important in community psychology for it leads to more equitable distribution of resources;

Community participation has also an inference for enhancing sense of community. Sense of community is enhanced through formation of voluntary groups and association in pursuing of collective action. Sense of community includes such qualities as membership, shared emotional connection, fulfillment of needs and sense of belonging (source). These qualities which may be derived from participation are enhanced whenever communities feel that their needs are met, when they derive satisfaction from influencing change, when they experience emotional attached to fellow members of the community which heightens sense of belonging and satisfaction. Community psychology has a goal of mobilizing individuals, communities and societies towards collectively defining their problems, devising solutions to such problems and working together to improve their wellbeing. Community participation in this case is a means to attaining sense of community which ultimately leads to prevention of community challenges or problems that may impede on the attainment of well-being of communities. It is therefore undebatable that participation by members of the community is important in community psychology as creates a sense of community.

Empowerment

Empowerment refers to the ability of people to gain understanding and take control over personal, social, economic, political forces in order to take action to improve their life situation. (Kasmel, A. 2012). It is a process by which individuals and communities are enabled to take power and act effectively in gaining greater control, efficacy, and social justice in changing their environment. The possibility of empowerment depends on two things, one that requires power to change and expand.

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Principle of empowerment according to Rappaport (1981) as quoted by Kasmel emphasizes that all people have existing strength and capabilities as well as the capacity to become more competent. The failure of a person to display competence is not due to deficit within the person but rather the failure of social systems to provide or create opportunities for competence to be displayed or acquired. Furthermore to this the Psychologist states that new competences are best learned through experiences that lead people to make self-attributions about their capabilities to influence important life events. Participation is one of the events that enable people to discover themselves. Therefore participation leads to empowerment.