

Critically compare and contrast community psychology and public health approaches...

[Science](#)



In this essay, I will critically compare and contrast community psychology and public health approaches to social problems. I will do this by comparing strengths and weaknesses of both approaches, as well as similarities between these approaches. To compare these two concepts, one should first have a basic understanding of the origins and historical development of community psychology and public health. According to the American Heritage Medical dictionary (www.ahdictionary.com) Community Psychology is "the application of psychology to community programs for the prevention of mental health disorders and the promotion of mental health." Community psychology has its roots in the mental health reform movements in the USA, according to Tutorial letter 102/0/2013 for Pyc4811 (2013). The three most important reform movements were the "moral treatment" (early 1800's), the "mental hygiene" (early 1900's) and "deinstitutionalisation" (1960's) (Tutorial letter 102/0/2013 for Pyc4811).

Each of these movements was intended to view and treat mental illness as a social problem rather than an individual problem. It was also a move towards 'prevention rather than cure' concerning mental illness. (Tutorial letter 102/0/2013 for Pyc4811) According to Tutorial letter 102/0/2013 for Pyc4811 (2013) there are two major models of community psychology: the Mental Health model and the Social action model. The location of mental illness, according to the Mental Health model, is at the method of interaction between individual and environmental factors.

The Social Action model places the location of mental illness 'within oppressive and exploitative social and economic structures' (Tutorial letter 102/0/2013 for Pyc4811, 2013) Public health, like community psychology, <https://assignbuster.com/critically-compare-and-contrast-community-psychology-and-public-health-approaches-to-social-problems/>

focuses on prevention of disease. It is defined as “ the science and practice of protecting and improving the health of a community as by preventative medicine; health education; control of communicable diseases; application of sanitary measures and monitoring of environmental hazards” by the American Heritage Dictionary (www.ahdictionary.com) Like community psychology, public health also focuses less on the individual and more on the public and society in general. Public health concerns itself with the prevention of lifestyle diseases, such as heart problems, as well as diseases of which the occurrence can be reduced if the public is educated about it, such as HIV/AIDS and cholera (Tut 102 for PYC4811). Public health, as practised in South Africa and most industrialized countries, is based on the biomedical/western model of illness.

According to this model, the reason for disease and distress (and, therefore, mental illness) is because of lesions within the body or mind. These lesions are caused by an interaction between a.) The characteristics of the individual (such as age, educational level, nutritional status, etc), b.) Disease-causing agents (such as germs, viruses, alcohol, etc) and c.) External environmental and social issues (such as poverty, war, pollution, etc). (Tutorial letter 102/0/2013 for Pyc4811, 2013). According to Marc Zimmerman (<http://www.answers.com>), there are many similarities between the Community Health and Public Health fields, such as their methods, topics, theories and values. Both fields use methods such as advocacy, community organizing, policy influence, and dissemination (Zimmerman, <http://www.answers.com>). They also both apply theories and conceptual models, such as empowerment theory, social change theories and ecological

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theory. Community Psychology concerns itself with cultural issues and differences through the application of theory, research and intervention programs.

This is similar to Public Health approaches because these programs are designed to match the values, norms, and beliefs of the community or public, whether the focus is on ethnic, behavioural, gender, or cultural differences. Both Community Psychology and Public Health regard social relationships and involve the community. Both also consider the external factors when looking at the individual's problems, so as not to solely blame the individual for the problem, and will advocate social rather than individual change. (Perkins, 2011)

There are, however, key aspects in which the two approaches differ. While Community Psychology concerns itself more with mental health issues and behavioural aspects of health (such as promiscuity, drug use, etc) , Public Health seems to focus more on traditional health issues, such as communicable diseases (like HIV/AIDS, T. B, etc). The two approaches also differ in the sense that Community Psychology focuses on theory and social research, while Public Health has a more practise-orientated approach to social problems. Zimmerman, [http://www. answers. com](http://www.answers.com)) To conclude, I would not say that these differences are irreconcilable, as the two approaches have more in common than they differ. When dealing with the mental health of the community, I believethat it would be advantageous to apply both Community Psychology AND Public Health approaches. Because both approaches focus on prevention and empowerment, as well as

community involvement, they can fulfil each other's short comings by using the same principles.