



Community psychology: a work to be developed in the communities of Colombia

Fernando Arturo Romero Ospina

Gonzalo Jiménez Departmental Educational Institution

De Quesada Rural Headquarters Cuayá, Colombia.

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4744-3234>

humanodelirio@yahoo.com

Submitted on 04 th July, 2023 / Accepted on 08 th September, 2023

<https://doi.org/10.5377/rtu.v12i35.17004>

Keywords: Empowerment, Community psychology, Liberation psychology.

ABSTRACT

The following essay wants to reflect on community psychology as a field of knowledge, which is a recent discipline that needs to be discussed at the epistemological, ontological, and methodological levels, especially in the Latin American context because of its legacy and importance in the most vulnerable communities.

For this reason, this paper wants to identify some of the characteristics, perspectives, and possibilities of study of community psychology in the Latin American context it begins by discussing its object of study identifying a differentiation between community psychology with social psychology, and subsequently describes its origin to establish contrasts in the North American and Latin American context. Finally, it pointed out the importance of community psychology in the Colombian context that takes into account a perspective of the psychology of the liberation of Ignacio Baros and the empowerment of communities in the post-conflict process that the country is currently experiencing.

INTRODUCTION

Psychology as Lahey (2010) points out, is the science of behavior and mental processes definition that visualizes for this author three components: the first identification as a science

since it tries to understand the human being from techniques and methodologies such as observation, measurement, and description among others. The second is to study behavior as the actions of people at the behavioral level that involves nonverbal language, personality, and actions performed by the individual. Finally, you have mental processing involving emotions, thoughts, and feelings that are not observable.

From the above, psychology paraphrasing Lahey (2010) raises four objectives that are: describe information quantitatively and qualitatively, predict behaviors, understand and influence behavior so it asks why certain behaviors and behaviors, and finally influence the individual with which the psychologist not only stays in the description and understanding, instead, he seeks help positively.

Understanding the above there are different perspectives and approaches to the study of the behavior of the individual at the biological, social, and cognitive levels and one of these is the relationship that exists between the individual with the community, the classical theory seeks to explain the behavior of a certain group from the analysis of individual behavior in the social context and points out that the group is not reduced to the sum of its members without. However, this proposal falls short because it does not study reality from its various dimensions as proposed by the psychosocial theory.

There is an importance of the community in the psychic processes of individuals since we create links with and from the "Other" finding answers and questions, generating encounters and ruptures, leading us to a dilemma about coexistence, roles, and actions that we carry out in and from the community in which we find ourselves.

We can remember the example given by Schopenhauer with the dilemma of the hedgehogs which consists of asking how in winter time these animals can get together in time without hurting themselves and extrapolates it to the relationships that we establish as human beings, of the difficulties that are established between people in the social context since we build ourselves with the other.

For this reason, the need arises in psychology a proposal different from the classic medical model that only sees the patient as an object and not as a subject, which does not take into account the context that surrounds it and the relationships that are built in these generating the need a model as Montero (2004) points out where "the emphasis will be on the community and not on the strengthening of institutions" (2004, p.20) allowing people to be protagonists and transformers of their reality.

A proposal that breaks established schemes and allows the people of the communities to play a leading role, paraphrasing Montero (2004) community psychology is a response to a

social psychology that maintains an individualistic perspective that did not give answers to the situation that was lived at the time because it was considered objective and neutral, which was limited to diagnosis and decontextualized interventions.

In this scenario, community psychology works initially with mental health and community social psychology, so that its object of action has as methodological models participatory action research and the application of ethnographic and qualitative methodology, for which psychologists in this discipline have an approach to communities to be able to know them and that they are also participants in the resolution of their conflicts.

Although the aforementioned elements are important in the practice of the community psychologist, there is also the risk of establishing false idealisms and romanticisms when working with communities from good intentions and the need to seek short-term solutions to the problems of communities generating dependence or assistance.

It is necessary to understand that the communities and the processes that can be established are not exempt from tensions, conflicts, and negotiations, For this reason, commenting on Dobles (2015), highlights the importance of the processes that are carried out in community psychology but also to establish a critical review of the different proposals of this discipline since it can fall into homogeneous and repetitive actions, Since having an anti-hegemonic and discolonizantes proposal its impact reaches a point of complacency that loses its critical proposal, becoming what it initially wanted to fight.

For this reason, one of the characteristics highlighted of community psychology is its ethical-political component that develops from psychological empowerment, Morales and Banda (2015) define it as the relationship between strengthening, empowerment, and empowerment, which is framed in the idea of cultural transformation important elements in the Colombian context that lives a post-conflict process today.

The importance of community psychology in the Colombian context lies in the fact that the country has suffered violence in a prolonged way, and although there are current initiatives to build peace processes, this must be accompanied by the reconstruction of a social fabric that generates changes in individuals and the community.

To better understand the above, it is necessary to have perspectives of this discipline by identifying its development, characteristics, and postulates to understand the Latin American proposal for social transformation from the psychology of liberation and psychological empowerment that allows influencing the communities of Colombia, especially those who have experienced violence. displacement and discrimination.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE THEME

To understand community psychology must first make a difference with social psychology has the object of study to understand and predict the behavior of individuals from their interactions, as paraphrasing Clay (1979) studies relationships in social interaction and the behavior of people, and he proposes to study common sense and conventional wisdom with which "social psychology deals with the processes of behavior, causal factors and outcomes of human-group interaction" Clay, 1979, p.20)

The proposal of social psychology seeks to work on key concepts such as leadership, roles, communication, and conflict among others that frame questions such as why do people have certain behaviors in specific social contexts? In addition to studying the different interactions that are present in social relationships.

The interest of social psychology as described by Clay (1979) lies in the study of aspects of interpersonal events since this can generate a series of behaviors, attitudes, and feelings in individuals, but also identify behaviors that are established in groups that will become social norms this has an impact on members in their interpersonal behavior.

For its part, community psychology focuses on working to improve the living conditions of people in specific geographical contexts, so that from this discipline they will work with organizations and cultural and social movements generating a process of active participation.

To understand the above, it is necessary to make a journey from its origin to Misitu (2004) finds its beginnings in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries from the sociologists of the Chicago school who relate mental disorders with social factors among which can be found lack of social integration, Let us remember that at this time great changes and transformations were made at the social, political, economic level that are not reduced to the consolidation of the industrial revolution but also to the beginning of the great world wars.

For his part, Montero (2004) adds that this discipline in North America had a key moment with the 1965 congress in Swampscott, Massachusetts, where the role of the psychologist was discussed and the need to work with the community position that was linked to the Community Health Movement and the fight against poverty, allowing a field of exploration for new studies.

Community psychology describes Montero's (2004) part in the sixties and seventies of the twentieth century to gain momentum thanks to the various proposals including the theory of dependence that had an impact on the social sciences and psychology in particular began to consider social groups, society, and people. In this way there is also a change of perspective on

what is understood as disease and health, raising questions about the role of psychology, and how treatments were approached and carried out.

The North American society in this time is aware of the inequalities that its population finds, generating movements that criticize the concept of health that was understood as an absence of disease to link it to a state of well-being existing an indiscriminate use at the time of community psychology and mental health as similar disciplines.

However, North American psychology raises an individualistic component that is evidenced in its intervention that focuses on the development of personal competencies for which Misitu (2004) presents the following characteristics: a scarce community approach in the interventions, its origin is from the relationship to mental health, the methodology is qualitative of ethnographic type and is considered unscientific.

Along the same lines, Fernández et al (2011) take up how this Anglo-Saxon proposal is characterized because it seeks the transformation of North American health systems being an ecological position where behavior is not explained at the individual level but must take into account components such as environmental, social and cultural, giving importance to prevention rather than cure.

Of these concerns, community psychology poses actions of social transformation so paraphrasing Misitu (2004) is a discipline although with difficulties in delimiting its object of study, stands out for ecological vision, social and individual processes, does not focus on giving answers but on developing potentialities in the individual and the community, It has a very close relationship between theory and practice, a vocation for prevention because it seeks to work with people in the community on strategies and actions that generate transformations in the quality of life.

However, community psychology in Latin America, although it will take up elements of the North American proposal, builds its path based on the needs of the communities, both for Misitu (2004) and Dobles (2015) its development is located in the seventies, with two exponents: Paulo Freire and Orlando Fals Borda, the first recognized for his contributions to popular education and the second for his approach to action research.

Community social psychology in the Latin American context is related to the social and political reality of the communities being a response to the deep inequality and dictatorships that were lived at the time, which sought to respond to the different problems that communities lived from the same communities.

From the situation that was lived in the authoritarian governments, Latin American community social psychology generates a series of proposals among which stands out that of

Martin Baros psychologist and Jesuit priest who died tragically in 1989 in El Salvador, his work aims at the analysis based on the reality in which it is lived in the Salvadoran communities, allowing to build a theoretical knowledge that defines the usefulness of analytical schemes as tools to transform and understand reality.

The contribution of this author is the psychology of liberation that seeks to overcome individualism and keep in mind a critical realism that investigates social history as a component of psychology research. In the same way, it is a psychology that is committed to the oppressed being aware of the context by asking questions about the From where and from whom.

What Martin Baro in the words of Cabanilla (2010) called "the sinful order" is a proposal that takes into account the contributions of psychology and adds the visibility of the inequality that exists in Latin America is one of the reasons why the construction of democratic partitive societies is difficult so far.

But this proposal broadens its spectrum seeking to highlight the violence faced by communities, social exclusion, and poverty that for decades has afflicted the peoples of this latitude, with anti-democratic governments that do not contribute to the recognition of the rights of the civilian population, especially indigenous, peasant and Afro-descendant peoples as subjects of law.

The contributions of liberation psychology to community psychology are valuable and of transcendence today, but they must be understood as Dobles (2015) points out from an ethical-political perspective, which allows debating the same praxis of community psychology from its action in communities so as not to lose its horizon.

You can not lose your way in community work, because for Dobles (2015) work in communities is developed in micro areas that may be linked to large spheres or not, sometimes presenting a tension between the micro and the macro, with which this author draws attention to the temptation to fall a romantic vision that moves away from the dynamics of the realities of the same community, So it is important to have a critical reading of the context accompanied by an ethical and political stance.

Now, in the relationship between the micro and the macro as described by Dobles (2015) conflicts are generated because although a community needs a transformation and cover a series of pressing needs, it is possible that an organization can establish a plan from good intentions but that in practice as a result a homogenization and new dependencies are fostered, giving rise to new problems.

Another temptation is to establish the belief that the actions that positively affected a community can be replicated in the same way in another community expecting the same

results since each community is different, in its beliefs, perspectives, and ways of resolving its conflicts, so it is necessary to promote a participatory work with the same communities that must be builders of the solutions to their problems, through participatory methodologies and democratic participation.

On the other hand, Berroeta (2012) citing Montero (1984) community psychology as a discipline starts from psychosocial factors looking for "(...) Develop, promote and maintain the control and power that individuals can exercise over their individual and social environment to solve problems that afflict them and achieve changes in those environments and the social structure" (p.11) being its main axis the strengthening and constitution of communities.

Now, community psychology has a series of models that allow it to carry out its praxis among which we can highlight the model of empowerment, formulated by Julian Rappaport in 1977 that aims to improve well-being and quality of life based on the empowerment of both individual, group and community resources.

For Morales and Banda (2015) "empowerment is considered the process by which people, organizations, and communities achieve control over their affairs" (p.5) that is, people assume control over their lives that at the same time can be seen as a result or process and that is linked to the individual, organizational and community.

In this way, empowerment is an invitation to a protagonism of the individual and the community to improve both well-being and quality of life, promote the empowerment of individual and community resources, and allow them to control their existence, is a theoretical proposal in practices in the construction of alternative solutions.

The empowerment intervention is designed as a preventive action, to promote and mobilize both the resources and potentialities that the communities have, they keep in mind the problem specifically to be solved, it seek to generate solutions such as the strengthening of support networks, understanding both micro and macro social factors as is the case in the family component and support systems that raise both psychological and mental well-being.

With the above, community psychology is a proposal for social transformation, and in the case of the Colombian context that has experienced violence in such a prolonged way, it poses relevant challenges since from this profession spaces can be generated to "heal wounds of the past" and promote a quality of life in the psyche of individuals and communities.

In post-conflict processes where there are tensions between the past with the present, the uncertainty of the future, the search for reconciliation, and above all the search for the non-repetition of acts of violence, a commitment from humanism in the transformation of the environment is needed.

To make these changes it is necessary to potentiate in the communities, leadership, creativity, assertiveness, and teamwork the latter linked to the construction of pacts based on dialogue to be able to fulfill the various achievements or goals that are built within the communities from critical thinking that lead to rebuilding the social fabric.

However, it must be borne in mind that the strategies, and activities that accompany them and the goals that can be carried out are conditioned by both internal and external factors, a point of reference is the realities that the communities live. In addition, understand that social changes occur slowly and gradually, so external agents must carry out a process of constant feedback with the community on the problems, progress, and objectives to be achieved in the process so as not to fall into an instrumentalization.

To carry out this type of action, community psychology must be accompanied by theoretical and practical tools such as the Metaplan, which is a technique of qualitative methodology that for Veiga et al. (2020) "is defined as a cooperative-based problem-solving technique (..)" (p.1004) where cooperation, community participation and a democratic act of participation are also present.

Another technique to highlight is social cartography since paraphrasing Díez et al (2017) allows traveling in the territories, seeing what seems to be hidden in the communities, the construction of this a map from the exchange of ideas, identifying actions and conflicts that are present in the territories generates an identity.

CONCLUSIONS

Community psychology is a branch of recent psychology, if one keeps in mind that its origins are in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which begins to talk about it as Misitu (2004) points out at the conference held in Swampscott (Boston) in 1965 its object of study is still debated today since it has a psychosocial basis also has procedures, Techniques, and methodologies that it shares with social psychology confusing at the epistemological level.

Now, community psychology since its inception has been linked to mental health due to the Anglo-Saxon conception however in the Latin American context it responds to other needs linked in its beginnings to movements and postulates such as liberation theology and contributions from Paulo Freire and Orlando Fals Borda.

From the above, this discipline seeks change in the members of a community, having the clarity that the psychologist is not an agent that is above the community, but from his praxis allows the community to recognize and make changes, but also seeks to potentiate positive factors of the community.

It is essential to be able to consolidate this field of knowledge so research and the publication of articles will give it a position in the academic world and could open new debates, it must also build bridges with other knowledge such as anthropology or sociology to generate new perspectives.

This type of discipline is very important in contexts such as Colombian since it is a country that suffers from alexithymic that is to say the inability to identify one's own emotions so as a science that tries to understand the human being, observes the behavior studying the mental processes where emotions, thoughts, and feelings are present, It has an important role in finding solutions to the mental health crisis that is currently being experienced.

For this reason, in the actions carried out by community psychology, it is not enough just to know the theories, and postulates of the philosophical schools, it must understand the different contexts, interact with the different realities that people face, criticize the traditional role of the psychologist who describes himself as an agent who only diagnoses to turn him into an actor of social changes.

Finally, community psychology must give the possibility of encounters and disagreements, starting where people can tell their life story, and their feelings without feeling judged. The role of the community psychologist is dialogue, beating human rights, and carrying out empowerment processes with communities.

WORK CITED

- Berroeta, H. (Ed.). (2012). Theory and practice of community action: contributions from community psychology. Santiago de Chile, CL: RIL editores. Read pages 1-25. <https://elibro-net.bibliotecavirtual.unad.edu.co/es/ereader/unad/68254?page=1>
- Clay, H. (1979). Introduction to Social Psychology. Edit. Trillas, Mexico.
- Diez, J., Escudero, H., Carballeda, A., Barberena, M., Hallak, Z., Rocha, E., Massera, C., Vázquez, A., Barceló, M., Coñuecar, V., Gómez, P., Gómez, D., Feü, C., Martínez, N., & Moreno, N. (2012). Social Cartography: Research and intervention from the social sciences and application experience. 1st ed. ISBN: 978-987-21581-8-7. Comodoro Rivadavia: Universitaria de la Patagonia, p. 5-8. Retrieved from: <https://www.margen.org/Libro1.pdf>
- Fernández, I., Morales, F., Molero, F. (2011). Psychology of community intervention. Bilbao, ES: Editorial Desclée de Brouwer. Read Chapter 3. Retrieved from <https://elibro-net.bibliotecavirtual.unad.edu.co/es/ereader/unad/108806?page=98>
- Lahey, B. (2010). Introduction to Psychology. Madrid: McGraw-Hill. 9th edition.

- Misitu, G., (2004) Emergence and development of community psychology. In Misitu, G., Blacksmith. O., Quarry. E. (2004). Introduction to community psychology. Barcelona. Spain. Ed. UCO. Read Ch. 1. pag18 Retrieved from <https://elibro-net.bibliotecavirtual.unad.edu.co/es/ereader/unad/56318?page=18>
- Montero, M. (2004). Introduction to community psychology: Development, concepts, and processes. Paidós.
- Morales, M. & Banda, A. (2015). Psychological empowerment: a systemic model with individual and community components. Journal of Psychology. Pontifical Catholic University of Peru Lima, Peru. Retrieved from <http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=337838597001>
- Moscovici, S. (1984). The field of social psychology. Moscovici S. Social psychology I. Barcelona, Spain: Paidós.
- Veiga-Seijo, S., Movilla-Fernández, M. J., & Rivas-Quarneti, N. (2020). Scoping review on the Metaplan as a qualitative research methodology in Health Sciences. New Trends in Qualitative Research, 3, 1000-1007.
- Cabanilla, B. (2010, December). Ignacio Martín Baró and the psychosocial gaze (or the union of examination, criticism, and ethics from Latin America). Reflection, 39, 24-28.