COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY – AN INTEGRATIVE APPROACH

Răzvan Lucian Andronic

Assoc. Prof., PhD, "Spiru Haret" University

Abstract: In Romania, psychology as a science is practiced mainly to solve individual problems, and the organization of practicing psychology as a liberal profession reflects this. Although there is some time that the field of study of community psychology has been established, there are little practitioners nationwide. The paper aims to present a brief history of this approach, principles of action and its possible applications in Romanian communities.

Keywords: community, psychology, intervention, empowerment, prevention.

1. "Community" in European culture

For Piero Amerio (Zani and Palmonari, 2003) the concept of community is originated in German Romanticism, although its origins could be deciphered long before "the patristic and medieval scholasticism to Greek thought."

Thanks to Ferdinand Tönnies (1887) concept came into mainstream science. German sociologist formula distinction between "Gemeinschaft" ("community"), where individuals merge into a totality and "Gesellschaft" ("association", "company"), where personal interests guiding the conduct or behavior (Ferreol, p. 41), the study of community was never spared political inferences (Boudon ... 1996, 62).

In the beginning, community had a strong reformist intent (F. Le Play, H.H. Stahl, etc) to develop psycho-sociological analysis is accompanied by search of an ideal of social integration. In everyday language the term "community" means a human community with character, interests and norms of common life, constituted historically and grouped in a single area (neighborhood,

101

village, city, country), a human group formed by different criteria (ethnic, linguistic, religious, etc.) or a group of countries linked by common understood (European Community OPEC etc.).

In all his appearances in everyday language "is the word used to refer to the idea that there is something common to a group or part of the population" (Hawtin, Hughes and Percy-Smith 1998, 33).

The term such commonly used it is difficult to define. It was used even at the highest level of generality, in an attempt to differentiate the West to the East. The first space would develop cultures that emphasize individuality and development, while the second would be cultivated mainly concern to the community, whose interests prevail over individual ones.

Traditional dichotomy between West and East is but a false one, because the two areas are not uniform in cultural terms, being made up of a multitude of "cultural areas" (Nakamura, 1997, 13): "the area where an advanced nation in culturally has settled its cultural tradition in its own way."

The multitude of meanings and connotations of "community" makes it virtually impossible a comprehensive definition, to be fully accepted even within a single "cultural areas". A number of elements are common and can be tracked even a history of ideas on this subject within the framework of what is usually subsemnează phrase "European culture" cultural areas of the geographical area of Europe and their irradiation in other continents.

"The problem" of community consists precisely in "dual use" of the term in contemporary society "so as shorthand for services or organizations situated and organized locally and as an ideology which expresses the concepts of accessibility, local authority social solidarity and sharing the benefits. " (Jones, 1994, 131)

In general, the "community" is seen in a positive light and evokes the closeness and warmth of human relations (Hawtin ... 1998, 34). Although there are undoubtedly communities where these feelings are present, in many cases, real efforts are needed to develop "community spirit".

Community returned in the maninstream of the socio-human sciences toghtether with an increasing interest in community development.

Dumitru Sandu (2005,15) defined community development (DEVCOM) as "voluntary change in, by and for the community", characterizing the concept from the practica experience in post-communist Romania:

"In principle, there can be community development without meeting the four criteria previously mentioned intervention: within a social group ("in the community") for the benefit of its members ("for community") and with their help ("by the community") voluntary or semivoluntar. Essential think that it is his participatory dimension, related to community members, a voluntary, (Sandu, 2005, 26-27).

Thus defined, DEVCOM has a broad coverage, including numerous types of intervention activities which do not exclude from the start motivating and obtaining benefits, including financial benefits, "a label tolerant for a family, relatively disorganized practices or models of local intervention that they have or tend to result in "greater good of the community "" (Sandu, 2005, 15).

2. An integrated approach of the issues: community psychology

The Swampscott Conference (near Boston, USA) was held in May 1965, which is considered to be "the official date" of birth of community psychology. The conference was attended by a lot of clinical psychologists worried about current professional practices in the field and oriented toward social and political changes.

At the end of the conference an agreement was reached to focus efforts on actions of prevention, not on the treatment itself and it was accepted the fact that the inclusion of the ecological perspective (matching person-situation) is an essential element of professional practice.

A summary of those concerns was done after the " Dohrenwend model " (1978), which even now represents a real "reference system" in community psychology. The defining notes of the model are:

- The opposition to the medical, paternalistic model;
- The differentiation between psychosocial stress and psychopathology - "normal emotional reaction to a traumatic life event which does not imply that an individual is mentally ill" (Schileppi, Teed and Torres, 20);

– Emphasizing the importance of the time factor in intervention (the best chances to succeed are given by its onset during or at the beginning of the crisis);

– Encouraging the provision of social services proactively, not reactively. In other words, it is rather preferred the searching than the waiting for potential beneficiaries concerning the provision of such services;

– Promoting contacts with the media and the political sphere, to demonstrate the effectiveness of social services and (especially long term) negative consequences and the reduction of funds allocated to them.

At present there is no universally accepted formal definition of community psychology, but a few are known and most frequently cited (Duffy and Wong, 2000, 8):

- "Community psychology …has progressed concerning the study of the effects of environmental and social factors on behaviors at the individual level, group, organization and society." (Heller, 1984).

-"The psychology of the community is in part an attempt to find alternatives to treating deviance from social norms. From this perspective it is an attempt to uphold the right of every person to be different without the risk of financial penalties and psychological suffering. "(Rappaport, 1977)

- "The psychology of the community is viewed as an approach of human behavioral problems that show the contributions to their development by environment forces and also, potential contributions to be made in order to alleviate problems by using these specific forces." (Zax and Specter, 1974).

For Orford (1998, 15) more important than a formal definition is enunciating the principles of community psychology:

1. Presumptions on the causes of problems: An interaction over time between individuals and institutions and social systems, including the structure of social support and social power;

2. Levels of analysis: from macro- to micro-level, particularly in organizations and communities or neighborhood;

3. Research Methods: include quasi-general models, qualitative research, action research and case studies;

4. Localizing the practice: As close as possible to daily relevant social contexts;

10. Approaching planning services: Proactive, "in seeking", assessing the needs and special risks in a community;

11. Practical accent: more on prevention than on treatment;

12. The co-participation attitude of others in the psychology. Positive, in formal and informal ways, including consultations;

13. The position when working with amateurs: strongly encourages self-help and seek ways to facilitate and collaborate with them.

2. Current and future concerns in addressing communities from the psychosocial point of view

Along with the attempts to formally define community psychology are also frequently noticed inventories of its major themes (Duffy Wong, 2000, 13-18):

4) *Prevention rather than treatment*

Community psychology plays a proactive role rather than a reactive one due to the practice of the three levels of prevention:

1) Primary: focusing the efforts so that the problem does not occur;

2) Secondary: approaching the problem at the earliest stage possible, before it becomes severe or persistent;

3)Tertiary: reducing the severity when dealing with a lasting problem.

2. *The emphasis on strengthening and competence*

The psychology of community places competence in the center of its priorities (a "basic desire to know you are able" - R. White) and also the strengthening of the behaviors that generate it. This emphasis blends perfectly with the concept of prevention: if necessary reinforcements occur early in life, problems can be avoided more easily in the future.

– *The importance of the ecological perspective*

One of the most important authors of the domain, Rappaport, is frequently quoted with following definition: "the ecological perspective represents an examination of the relationships between people and environments (both social and physical) and setting the perfect match between the person and the situation." The ecological perspective affirms the transactional nature of the environment and the person and both of them could be subject to review and change; thus the theories of the person-in-context are widely used.

4. *Respect for diversity*

Looking at diversity as a fact of life urges restraint in assessing the other person according to generally applicable cultural standards, having labeling as "deficient" or "deviant" as a result. Although this concern for cultivating diversity seems to be of common sense, it was imposed as a principle of action due to adverse consequences of labeling applied by those called to intervene.

A study by Rosenhan, from 1978 (described in Schileppi ... 2000, 12-13) showed that psychiatric diagnoses which are indispensable for an effective treatment unfortunately can be used to the detriment of those in need. The participants in this study appealed to various mental health services claiming to "hear voices"; without exception, they were admitted to psychiatric centers, usually under the label of "possible a schizophrenic." Once admitted, Rosenhan's volunteers were instructed to not show any additional "symptoms" or unusual behavior. However, any behavior was interpreted as a result of the initial presumed psychiatric disorder. For example, one of the participants (a psychology student) used to keep every day, a journal; his work has been described in the observation sheet as "compulsive note-taking."

Despite the fact that the pseudo-patients no longer recounted that they were "hearing voices" and showed no other symptoms, the average length of stay was 70 days! Rosenhan's conclusion: psychiatric diagnoses prevented specialized staff to see that the "patients" were as normal as possible ...

5. *"Empowerment"*

It represents the process of increasing the possibilities by which a person / group can control their lives actively, along with a democratic participation in the community.

Although it essentially means "to do", the action itself does not belong to psychologists, but to those assisted. Hence the criticism: "empowerment" would lead to individualism, confrontation, psychosocial conflict. Despite these criticisms, this issue is devoted to a role: it is present in almost any academic course structure, special practical training internships are available and attended by members of different disadvantaged groups, and various conferences devoted to the subject are held.

6. *Choosing between alternatives*

It involves both providing the opportunity to chose between the social services in the community and ensuring their access.

7. *Social Change*

In its planned form, it is a major concern in the psychology of community: what will change is chosen in advance and is directed to increase "the community spirit". Efforts are being made to ensure an active role of those affected by change.

Thus seen, the social change is expressed through the practice of intervention (Neculau, 2001, 7): "The word *intervention* is used by theoreticians in the sense of *planned change*, and it designates an action by which the protagonists participate voluntarily in a project of deliberate change".

8. *Action-research*

Action-research is preferred in the psychology of community, both for theoretical considerations (cf. "the Dohrenwend model") and especially practical. It is a form of intervention that has results in the case of pressing social problems and can produce the social change pursued. Most commonly in the community psychology the action-research couple meets under the form of organizing a campaign.

9. *Collaboration with other disciplines*

To produce social change in the way it has been planned is a monumental task, impossible without the collaboration with other disciplines, through awareness of how others see the same problems from their own specialization point of view (history, economics, sociology, anthropology, political science, environmental science etc.).

10. *A "sense of community" ("community spirit")*

One of the most important concepts of community psychology, "community spirit" is related to the subjective feeling of well-being and civic activism: through empirical research they were able to determine that voting, consulting officials, and so on are directly related to the "community spirit".

After McMillan and Chavis (1986) cited by Duffy and Wong, 2000 17 "community spirit" is the product of simultaneous action of four elements:

1. Membership in a group or organization (community, society);

2. Influence - means that people feel they can make a difference in their communities;

3. Integration or meeting the needs - suggest that the members of the community believe that their needs will be met by resources available in the community;

4. Emotional connection - implies that the members of the community and have one as such and will enjoy history, time, places and shared life experiences.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

1. Andronic, Răzvan-Lucian. (2008). *Elemente de dinamica grupurilor.* Sibiu: Editura Psihomedia

2. Boudon, R., Besnard, P., Cherkaoui, M. şi Lécuyer (coord.). (1996). *Dicţionar de sociologie Larousse*, Bucureşti: Editura Univers Enciclopedic.

3. Duffy, Karen G. şi Wong, F.Y. (2000). *Community Psychology*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

4. Ferréol, Gilles. (ed.) [1995] (1998). *Dicţionar de sociologie*. Iaşi: Editura Polirom.

5. Franzoi, Stephen L.. (1996). *Social Psychology*. Dubuque, IA: Brown & Bechmark Publishers.

6. Hawtin, M., Hughes, G. şi Percy-Smith, Janie (1998). *Community Profiling. Auditing social needs*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

7. Nakamura, H. (1997). *Orient şi Occident: O istorie comparată a ideilor*. Bucureşti: Editura Humanitas.

8. Neculau, A. (coord.) (2001). *Intervenţia psiho-socială în grupurile sociale defavorizate. Strategie şi metodologie.* Iaşi: Facultatea de Psihologie şi Ştiinţe ale Educaţiei.

9. Orford, J (1998). *Psihologia comunităţii. Teorie şi practică*. Bucureşti: Editura Oscar Print.

10. Scileppi, J., Teed, Elisabeth şi Torres R.D. (2000). *Community Psychology. A Common Sense Approach to Mental Health*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

11. Zani, Bruna, Palmonari, Augusto (coord.) [1996] (2003) *Manual de psihologia comunităţii*, Iaşi: Editura Polirom.