

# Community Action Research Centers Network

*Edited by Chris Keys, Bob Newbrough,  
Bradley Olson & Yolanda Suarez-Balcazar*

## Migrant Liberation Psychology: Coalition for the Study of Health, Power and Diversity

*Written by  
Manuel García-Ramírez, María-Jesús Albar  
& Virginia Paloma, Universidad de Sevilla*

The Coalition for the Study of Health, Power, and Diversity (CESPYD) located at the University of Seville, Spain, Department of Psychology, has as its primary mission to develop a psychology of liberation of the process of migration. To carry out its mission, the coalition sponsors several community-based research projects designed to increase the power, health and wellbeing of low-income immigrants, who are among the most disenfranchised groups in Europe. European social policies call for the development of explanatory models, methodological tools and practices to address the needs and challenges faced by immigrants. We particularly work with Moroccans in Andalusia, one of the most oppressed ethnic groups in Southern Europe.

Since 2008, CESPYD has included a group of investigators from the Universidad de Sevilla (see CESPYD logo in Figure 1) and it belongs to the European network HOME (COST, IS0603; Health and Social Care for Migrants and Ethnic Minorities in Europe). This network includes more than twenty universities around Europe financed by the European Union, representing one of the most solid forms of support and cooperation between a multidisciplinary group of European scientists involved in this field. The mission of the network is to increase the quality and coherence of European scholarship on migration, especially related to health, well-being and the need to adapt community services to the new multicultural social fabric. Our activities are funded by the Commission of the European Communities, the National Plan of Investigation of the Ministry of Science, the Spanish National Fund of Sanitarian Investigation, managed by the National Ministry of Health, the General Board of Migration Politics and the Regional Health Ministry of Andalusia.

CESPYD maintains a close collaboration

with other groups and centers nationally and internationally. Outstanding is the relation with the Universidad y Compromiso Social (University & Social Commitment [UyCS]), an initiative which encourages the creation and the harness of academic knowledge to impel a better society, linking communities and social movements with university settings. It also maintains a fluid collaboration with research institutes on an international level, such as the High Institute of Applied Psychology (ISPA) at Lisbon, the University Federico II at Naples, the European Research Centre on Migration and Ethnic Relations (ERCOMER) at the Utrecht University, the European Centre for the Study of Migration & Social Care (MASC) at the University of Kent and the Center for Capacity Building for Minorities with Disabilities Research (CCBMDR) at University of Illinois at Chicago.

CESPYD is coordinated by community and experimental psychologists from the Universidad de Sevilla and Almería who work with a group of multidisciplinary partners including nurses, social anthropologists, psychologists and community activists. CESPYD functions as a center in which internal operation is based on collaboration, synergies between disciplines, fostering effective communication and utilization of resources. Our work style promotes the development of innovative programmatic capacity by establishing useful and realistic goals driven by community needs and culturally competent interventions. Our format of collaboration allows us to fill gaps related to research on intercultural contacts and challenging community experiences of immigrants (e.g., discrimination, poverty and social fragmentation). At CESPYD we seek to involve community members in different phases of the research collaboration. For instance, one member is AMAL, a grassroots organization created by and composed of Andalusian Moroccan women, whose main goal is to empower and facilitate the integration of immigrant women. CESPYD researchers and community partners employ a collaborative and reflective methodology linking research and action and facilitating the empowerment process of participants

and different stakeholders. The professionals and investigators are utmost sensitive to the multicultural transformation of the social fabric their training, research and service activities are destined for. The vulnerable populations we work with have brought about changes and critical awareness within us as

we incorporate values based on the diversity and multicultural background of the participants.

Regarding theoretical orientation, CESPYD impels studies dealing with the integration of immigrants from the perspective

of the psychology of liberation assuming the values of equality, social justice, well-being, self-determination, and respect for diversity (Hernández-Plaza, García-Ramírez, Camacho & Paloma, in press). Herewith we try to shed some light on the fact that acculturative frameworks are failing to explain these issues, due to the inapplicability of acquired knowledge to the real practice of immigrant integration. From the mainstream cross-cultural perspective, acculturative integration is an individual process, which implies the acquisitions of the new culture while maintaining one's cultural heritage. Therefore the individual focus of acculturation frameworks is severely challenged by conditions of asymmetrical intergroup relations and unequal economic, social and political power that many immigrants must face within local contexts. Our approach underscores acculturative integration as the process by which newcomers become accepted in the new society through a reflexive and evaluative process, changing their social references, rebuilding their social and personal resources, and participating in their communities. We see acculturation integration as a multilevel and multidimensional process of psychopolitical empowerment, a process of self and citizenship construction (García-Ramírez, De la Mata, Paloma, & Hernández-Plaza, 2008).

Below we present a brief description of one of several projects and describe the development of a new Masters program.

### **A European vision of cultural competence: Differences, sensitivity and health literacy**

Disparities in health care are one of the main challenges in the international



Figure 1. CESPYD Logo

community and the level of cultural competence of its providers has become an emergent research topic. In European settings, health care is a controversial topic due, in part, to the existing paternalistic and stigmatizing services provided to low-income populations. A new vision based on *differences, sensitivity* and *health literacy* is emphasized among European health care stakeholders in which differences are seen as normal, equality as a value and negotiation as core strategies. This approach suggests a vision of ecological empowerment according to the values and assumptions of community psychology. Concerning health care systems, this vision requires universal availability, accessibility, acceptability and sufficient quality. As it relates to providers, it implies the competence to perceive and comprehend individual-life worlds in specific situations and in various contexts, and hence to assume appropriate forms of action. It also involves the health literacy of people and patients, which implies the active participation to seek out information and the entitlement of health care, including the capacity to contribute actively in its creation.

At CESPYD we are developing and testing best practices at improving the cultural competency of health care providers and enhancing their ability to foster consumer health literacy and consumer psychopolitical empowerment (García-Ramírez, Albar, Acosta, & Bocchino, 2009). This project is being carried out at the emergency room of the Hospital "Virgen Macarena", Seville (Spain) by community nurses, psychologists and community organizers belonging to CESPYD. Based on a participatory action research approach, this project is building: 1) critical awareness among health professionals of their personal and organizational limitations and exploring strategies to overcome them; 2) collaboration with migrant communities and key stakeholders; and 3) user's health literacy through information materials, training workshops and volunteer participation.


### **The official Master of International Migrations, Health and Welfare of the Universidad de Sevilla**

CESPYP is taking a lead role in the implementation of an official postgraduate program "International Migrations, Health and Welfare: Models, Strategies and Interventions" at the Universidad de Sevilla. This program, which will be launched in Fall 2010, is designed to train students in engaging in culturally sensitive research

and practice aimed at understanding and addressing the health and welfare of migrant populations. In the context of achieving this goal, we are participating in the consortium of European universities, creating a curriculum development project on health and social care for immigrants and minorities coordinated by David Ingleby (University of Utrecht). The network brings together a group of experts on diversity and health, belonging to 16 scientific and professional European Institutions, the University of Utrecht being the coordinating entity.

Many recent political declarations by European and global intergovernmental organizations have stressed the urgency of tackling issues concerning the health of migrants. The most recent of these, the European Commission Communication *Solidarity in Health: Reducing Health Inequalities in the European Union*, included migrants and ethnic minorities among the vulnerable groups to which particular attention should be paid. Virtually all political statements and media declarations concerning migrant health describe the need for consumer health literacy and cultural competency of health care and social service professionals (e.g., psychologists, nurses, social workers, physicians among others) as the most urgent and serious problems.

### **Future**

CESPYD fosters the study of challenges that currently present the human exoduses from the perspective of the psychology of liberation. This perspective can enrich the international agendas of research and social policy, conducting research anchored in the communities we collaborate with, oriented to achieving social justice and well-being for all. Engaging in the psychology of migration, from an empowerment and participatory approach, is an urgent and necessary task. Our goal is to establish solid links with other groups, institutes, disciplines around the world which seek to promote multicultural citizens and fair multicultural communities for migrants. For more information about CESPYD visit our Web site at [www.cespyd.org](http://www.cespyd.org). 

*Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Manuel García-Ramírez, Facultad de Psicología, Departamento de Psicología Social, c/Camilo Jose Cela s/n. 41008 Sevilla, Spain. Email: magarcia@us.es*

### **Some new papers of CESPYD referenced**

### **in the article**

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- Hernández-Plaza, S., García-Ramírez, M., Camacho, C., & Paloma, V. (in press). Immigration and well-being in oppressive contexts: A liberation psychology approach. In C. Stuart (Ed.), *The Psychology of Global Mobility. International Psychology*. New York: Springer.
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## **The Community Health Interest Group**

**Edited & Written by Shannon Gwin Mitchell & David Lounsbury**

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Our special issue of the *American Journal of Community Psychology* was published in December 2009, representing the bulk of our Community Health Interest Group activities over the past two years. In our TCP column this month we would like to present a brief overview of our introductory article from that special issue on social ecological approaches to community health research and action.

### **Overview of Introductory Article**

Social ecological research and interventions are ideally suited for addressing the complex community health problems we face, in that they are systems-oriented