

# **IVth International Conference of Community Psychology**

---

## **Psychology for Liberation: Contemporary Currents Disaster Prevention and Response**

Catalina Argüello Gutiérrez  
Universidad de Granada

One of the main concerns of my work has been to really get involved in the contemporary challenges of Latin America. In this respect, a big issue that we find in our countries is the social impact of disasters. In the following ways, we share in the main ideas discussed in the Round Table in Barcelona.

### ***Basic background***

In order to understand this topic from a psychosocial perspective, it is important to recognize the basic background to be adopted. From the Psychology for Liberation framework we utilize the notion of psychosocial trauma. This concept focuses the collective view of the impact, in other words, the disasters affect “us” as a community, as a whole. The trauma is not only personal, it goes further than the individual level; it affects the way the whole community interrelates, its attachments, dynamics and expectations.

Also it's important to pay attention to the social perception of the events, needs and possibilities for action that occur before and after a disaster situation. In this way, the “objective” point of view is important, but the subjective and personal-communitarian perception takes our attention even more because it reflects the ways that people in that specific space and time represent the event, its causes and consequences. Taking the opportunity to analyze these perceptions allows us to really understand the best way to support the community.

Two other key notions are violence and oppression-power analysis. In order to understand the risk of the communities we need to analyze how they became vulnerable, why are they neglected by the formal socio political strategies, who has power and why, and also take the position of the oppressed. So following this line, there is an impossibility of neutrality; we need to take part in political and social discussions. If we can have a broader view we can analyse the disasters as a consequence of structural violence, because usually the communities that are affected by disasters are those that are the homes of the more excluded groups in our societies. That leads us to the second framework.

### ***Disasters and emergencies:***

Disasters are viewed as socially produced events. So it is fundamental that we analyze how we have been growing and developing as societies. The main impact of the disasters is not only the natural event, it is the socially-produced vulnerability and the impact that this has in communities that have been excluded and denied opportunities to optimize their lives.

In this way, risk, hazard and vulnerability are major components in the analysis of the history and memory of the communities. The context, culture, resilience and the capacity for reconstruction are also important.

### ***Psychosocial support***

Overcoming the “Psychiatric perspective”, we orient our efforts to mental health improvement, defining mental health from a relational, historical and community base. That way, the objective of our work is psychological assistance, planning our interventions to support the emotional, social,

relational and socioeconomic aspects of the community, providing tools to restore and develop coping skills. In order to do so, we need an interdisciplinary approach, and also remember that all of the team members need to take care of themselves and their own mental health.

So, integrating the main aspects on the former frameworks, we work from a psychosocial perspective, that orients our interventions to analyze inequalities and to promote social changes. We have to be clear in what we do, we work with human suffering, community disorganization, support and emotional accompaniment, prevention and reconstruction.

*Finally, we sum up the common notions that orientate our work:*

- Community base
- Historical memory
- Psychosocial trauma
- Socially Constructed Vulnerability
- The impossibility of being neutral (social commitment)
- Collective leadership

*Our main Challenges and possibilities*

- Prevention and vulnerability reduction
- Effective response and attention
- Facilitate local reorganization
- Real debate about the socioeconomic system
- How to participate in Fundraising, NGOs projects
- Evaluation and Continuity of the interventions
- Interdisciplinarity
- Media management
- Self Care

*What's next?*

- Incorporate what we have learned
- Real Participation
- Sustainability and Continuity
- Arts, music and youth expressions
- Look forward to structural transformations
- Rethink our theory from our praxis

To share more info and ideas you can write to: [arguellocatalina@correo.ugr.es](mailto:arguellocatalina@correo.ugr.es)