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The British  
Psychological Society  
Community Psychology Section

# **The Work of the Community Psychology Section: Charting Progress and Planning Future Directions**

**Facilitated by:**

**Dr Glenn Williams,**

**Incoming Chair of Community Psychology Section**

# Overview of Discussion Forum

- Brief overview of Community Psychology (CP) and history of CP in the UK
- Background to the CP Section
- The CP Section's aims and objectives
- Progress on the aims and objectives
- Discussing the way forward...



# What is Community Psychology?

- Its primary focus is on understanding, and working with, people in their wider social context **beyond seeing them purely as individuals**
- Acknowledges role of **systems** that exist around people relating to place, history, and culture that affect people's well-being and behaviour
- It uses a multi-layered focus (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010) with analysis of:
  - **micro-systems** (e.g. a family or social network),
  - **meso-systems** (i.e. links between micro-systems such as between home and school or relationships between work and home) and
  - **macro-systems** (e.g. social norms, economic systems and policies).



# Core Values of Community Psychology

- Placing people in their **social contexts**
- Includes central concepts of:
  - Power (Disempowerment.....Empowerment)
  - Social inclusion (Marginalisation.....Inclusivity)
- Involves working **collaboratively** with others
- Uses a **plurality of** research & development **methods** (e.g. participatory action research)
- More **critical** community psychological approaches challenge the status quo



# Origins of Community Psychology (CP) in UK #1

- Relatively new as an organised discipline in UK Psychology

One of the forerunners was from Europe:

- **Marie Jahoda** and colleagues studied an unemployed community, Marienthal, Austria in 1930s. Their conclusion = negative impacts best understood at the community, rather than the individual, level (Jahoda,1983)
- Jahoda was responsible for an important pioneering psychological study of a community in Wales.
- Jahoda became 1<sup>st</sup> woman professor at Sussex University and founded a version of Social Psychology closely related to community psychology.



# Origins of Community Psychology (CP) in UK #2

- Fast forward a few decades... Roots of CP in applied social psychology, mental health work, and clinical psychology.
- Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology launched in 1991 and co-edited by Orford.
- 1<sup>st</sup> textbook on Community Psychology produced in the UK in 1992 (Orford,1992).
- UK Community Psychology Network: health and social services managers, academics, campaigners, mental health service users and survivors, clinical psychologists, students and volunteers.
- Journals – members of the network have links to / contributed to Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology, est. 1991, and Community Work and Family.
- CP conferences held in the UK from the 1990s onwards.



# Origins of Community Psychology (CP) in UK #3

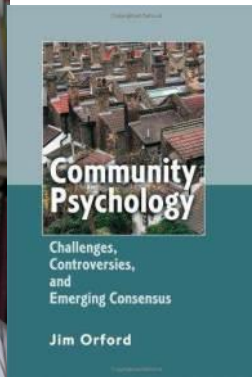
- Online discussion list (open to all who wish to foreground community-based interventions), at [jiscmail.ac.uk](mailto:jiscmail.ac.uk) 'CommunityPsychUK' list
- Strong tradition of critical psychology influencing CP. E.g. **Ian Parker and Erica Burman**.
- MMU integrates critical psychology and CP together as part of their undergraduate programmes.
- Growing links between health psychology and CP – **Michael Murray, David Marks and Carla Willig**.
- Proposal to the BPS for formation of a CP Section and the CP Section has its inaugural meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> October 2010



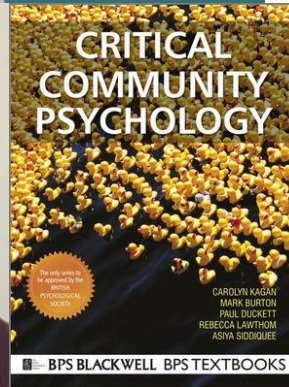


# Some Key People in UK Community Psychology

- Prof. Jim Orford



- Prof. Carolyn Kagan



- Prof. Jacqueline Akhurst



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# Some of the Initial Aims of the Section:

- **To get a better understanding of the multiple factors** (e.g. social, economic, political and environmental) **that cause or perpetuate psychological problems** in order for preventative strategies to be developed and put in place;
- **To develop partnerships**, where local knowledge of participants is valued as equal to expert knowledge, and professional skills are used collaboratively;
- **To collect evidence** of the impact of community-based interventions;
- **To undertake forms of inclusive, participatory action research** (and other more progressive research forms);
- **To engage, and influence**, policy makers.
- And **more recent aims and objectives** follow...



# 1. Dismantle disabling societal barriers and construct psychologically enabling contexts and practices

- raise awareness of socio-political and organisational issues affecting education, development and well-being
- challenge the dominance of individually-focused models of psychosocial adjustment and psychological intervention
- address people's strengths and competencies as well as problems and difficulties
- promote preventative interventions for health and well-being



## 2. Strive for social justice

- research the impact of local, national and international policies on health and well-being
- question established power structures and hierarchies
- lobby for ideologically progressive policies consistent with community psychology principles



# 3. Work in solidarity and mutual respect alongside people experiencing marginalisation, disempowerment and oppression

- work with community organisations towards collaborative understanding of issues of collective importance
- promote the interests of marginalised, disempowered and oppressed people
- facilitate community engagement to address issues affecting health and well-being
- encourage lobbying, community networking, advocacy and policy engagement



# 4. Engage with community psychology education and training

- promote the study and understanding of community psychology within community organisations, the health service, secondary schools, and further and higher education
- facilitate recognition that knowledge and expertise effective in promoting well-being and social justice can be found outside of professional contexts
- encourage and facilitate the British Psychological Society to communicate the impact of societal factors on psychosocial functioning,
- encourage critical reflection on the privileges held by British Psychological Society psychologists



# 5. Conduct research consistent with community psychology principles

- approach research from a standpoint of methodological pluralism
- employ methodological approaches which give voice to traditionally under-represented populations
- promote respect of diversity amongst people and settings
- exchange ideas through research publications, workshops, conferences, training sessions and practice



# Progress with these aims and objectives

- 1. Outreach presentations** to raise awareness of CP: For example, Annual Conference of BPS, Division of Counselling Psychology, Social Psychology Section, stall at Psychology 4 Students conferences (North and South); role of Outreach and Publicity Coordinator on Committee (Miltos Hadjiosif); 2015 Annual Conference symposium with several Branches
- 2. Two Festivals of Community Psychology** (2014 and 2015) – designed to be different to an academic conference and to be more Festival-like
3. Support and subsidising of Community Psychology Section sponsored **CPD programming** – 2 in 2014; 2 in 2015; projected to have 11 in 2016, with sessions on Liberation psychology, participatory action research, co-production and shaping public services, and many more!
- 4. Support for campaigns consistent with principles of CP:** e.g. Psychologists against Austerity





# Progress with these aims and objectives continued

5. **Online connectivity:** Community Psychology UK Ning, Twitter, Facebook page for the Festival

6. **Exchanging ideas on CP-relevant approaches to research methods** (e.g. Williams & Zlotowitz, 2013; Kagan's 5 workshops on participatory action research the first European summer school, supported by ECPA; Michael Richards, 2013 - in PsyPAG Quarterly)

7. Hosting discussions on issues relevant to **CP practice** (e.g. Discussion Forum in 2015 on competences in CP)

8. **Connections with international organisations** involved with Community Psychology in Europe (ECPA) and in the USA (SCRA) and links to the European Federation of Psychology Associations (EFPA) (e.g. Jacqui Akhurst's work on the EFPA 'Community Psychology' taskforce in 2012-13).



# Where next? You can help shape the direction of our Section!

1. What is the Section **doing well**?
2. What could the Section **focus more on**?
3. Would **you** be able to help contribute to meeting the Aims and Objectives of the Section and, if so, how?
4. What **other Aims and Objectives** would you like to see developed and targeted?



# Comments from participants

- What is going well:
  - Festivals and communications within the Section
  - The positive impact on BPS and taking a political stance
  - Lobbying (e.g. Psychologists Against Austerity and their briefing paper)
- Areas to work on:
  - Making it clear what opportunities there are for career progression in CP (outside academia)
  - More PR on when someone is doing work with a CP focus
  - Have it in every city (i.e. balance activities/events that have a local focus with those that have a national focus)
  - Improve access on information about CP to the general public
  - Activism (e.g. protesting, campaigning, letters to national press)
  - Raise awareness of CP
  - To explain in more effective way what 'community' means (for many [people], e.g. in inner London – may not be clear)
  - Shape the future of CP
  - Promote the principles of CP and the role of community psychologists

