

Utilizing community and humanistic psychology in the establishment of effective psychosocial interventions for people with addiction problems.

The example of the Self-Help Promotion Program in Greece.

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# Self Help Promotion Program of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki [www.selfhelp.gr](http://www.selfhelp.gr)

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- An ongoing (operating 23 years), funded by the Ministry of Health and in collaboration with the Greek Organization against Drugs (OKANA), university project that aims:
  - to the promotion of self-help/mutual aid practices to the confrontation of addiction, other psychosocial problems and health issues
  - to the education of social scientists, health practitioners and students
  - to the research (mainly participatory action research) of self-help/ mutual aid practices
- It operates in three different Greek cities (Thessaloniki, Larisa, Chania)
- SHPP constitutes a hybrid organization based on self-help/ mutual aid methodologies, that uses both health professionals and service users to all the phases of intervening (needs assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation of the intervention).
- Theoretical background: Critical aspects of various social sciences, Critical Psychology, Community Psychology

# Setting the context

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- Increase of addiction problems worldwide (substances & behavioral addictions), (UNODC, 2015, NIDA, 2018, CDC, 2018)
- Change in the profile and the needs of people with addiction problems and expansion of addictive behaviours (*Granfield, Cloud, 1996, Orford, 2001, Zafiridis, 1990*)
- Growing concern about the sufficiency of the methodologies used in the field of addictions (*Alexander, 2008, Humphreys 2015, Klingemann, 2020, Zafiridis, 2017*).
- *Self – help / mutual aid groups and initiatives as a reliable alternative in the field of addictions (Kelly, 2017, White 2014, Zafiridis, 2011, 2017)*
- *The important role of Self-help / mutual aid groups and initiatives today, since they influence the addiction field and the researchers (Humphreys, 2003, Kelly, 2014, White, 2014)*

# Setting the context

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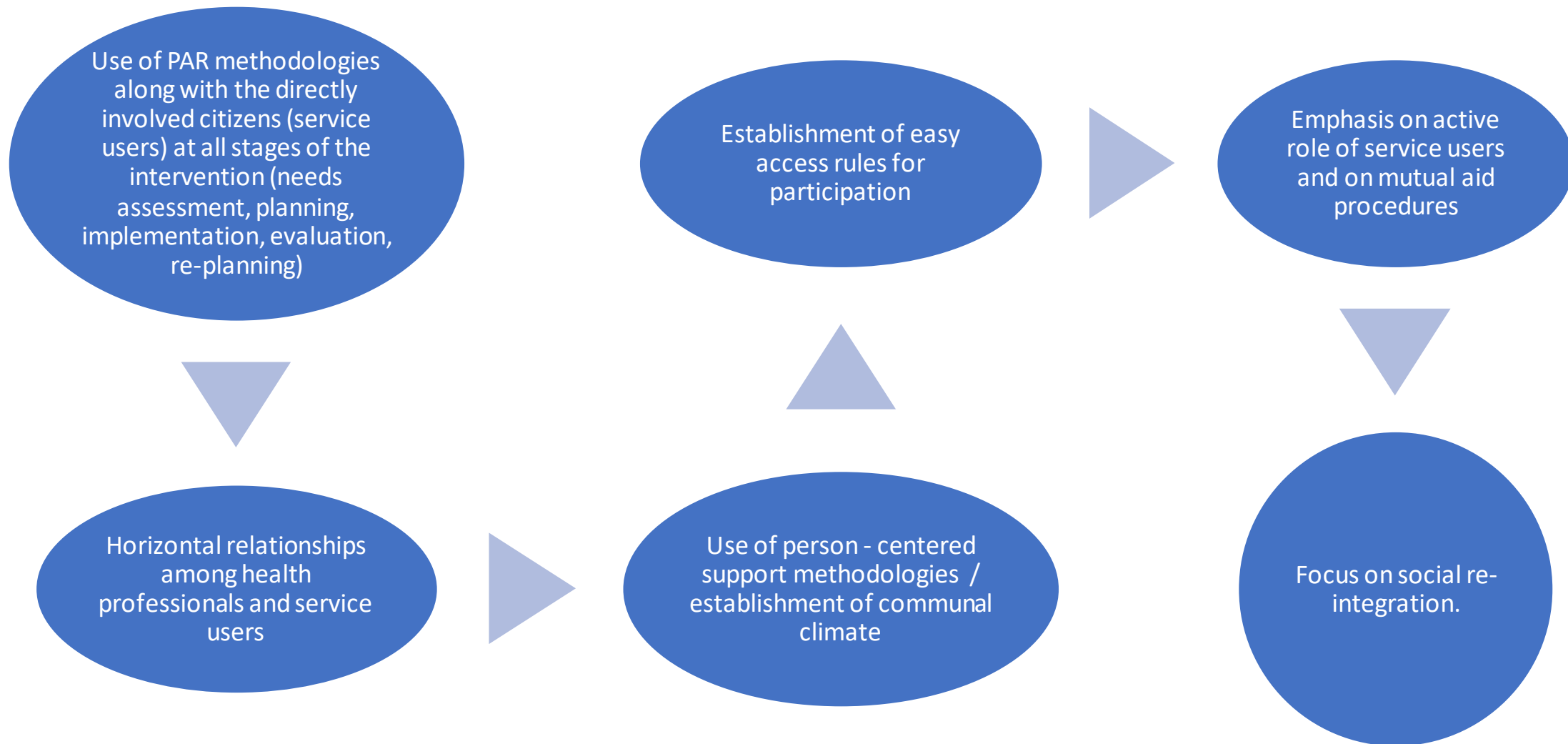
- The value of self-help/mutual help groups in confronting addiction & The importance of developing adequate methodologies for the advancement of the central role of the directly involved citizens (e.g. members of Self – Help/Mutual aid groups)
- The open question of establishing adequate methodologies that utilize the additional value of SH/MAGS in the confrontation of addiction or in other words how can we support people entering/participating in SH/MAGs? (Lainas, 2013, Zafiridis & Lainas, 2012b)

How can we establish adequate psychosocial interventions that utilize self-help/ mutual aid dynamics, without interfering to their core functions as autonomous groups/ initiatives?  
Examples from a long term participatory action research and an ongoing intervention in Greece.

- Long term (participatory) action research project (9 years) entitled:
- Psychosocial Interventions and Self - Help in the field of Addictions. The example of Self-Help Promotion Program of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.
- Main questions:
- What are the appropriate methodologies to support people who are participating or interested in participating in SH/MAGs?
- What are the emerging characteristics of the role of health professionals interested in working towards this direction?
- How do stakeholders perceive this type of interventions?
- Methodology: Long Term Participatory Action Research (PAR) in Self –Help Promotion Program, combined with Grounded Theory

Findings:

1) What are the appropriate methodologies to support people who are participating or interested in participating in SH/MAGs?



- What are the emerging characteristics of the role of health professionals interested in working towards this direction?

- Shift of the mainstream helping paradigm: from the model of the active expert and the passive recipient of services, to a more collaborative model, that gives a central and active role to service users
- Person – centered techniques (Humanistic Psychology/Psychotherapy)
- Respect of services users’ right to self determination
- Emphasis on experiential knowledge and on active role of service users
- Emphasis on collective procedures and self-organizing activities of service users themselves
- Advocacy for the importance of SH/MAGs

- How do stakeholders perceive this type of interventions?

- In accordance to the principles that SH/MAGs function
- Benefits that are reported:
- Safe and easy – accessible place and interconnected with SH/MAGs
- Communal Climate / Human environment
- A place that their experience and ideas can heard and utilized
- The service users are active ingredients of the psychosocial intervention
- Alternative function in contrast to medicalized interventions (e.g. communal climate, horizontal relationships with health workers, person – centered approach, flexible support methodologies that adapt to each person’s needs, not stigmatizing discourse)
- Activation, acquisition of important social and recovery skills (e.g. group cooperation skills, self efficacy, self esteem, respect to diversity, equal relationships)



# Discussion

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- Humanistic approaches of Psychology in this research emerge as an important suggestion for supporting members of self-help/mutual help groups. Why?
- Democratization of the relationship / sharing of power
- Person-centered view of individuals
- Active role of the people directly concerned needs adequate methodologies that do not interfere to the core elements of self help/mutual aid
- The importance of safety, empathy acceptance during support
- Methodologies that respect the discourse and the experiential knowledge of service users regarding their problems
- Methodologies that facilitate mutual, respectful and cooperative relationship between service users and practitioners / experts

# Discussion

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- Community Psychology also emerges in this research as an important suggestion for the establishment of adequate psychosocial interventions. Why?
- Participatory Action Research is a valuable tool
- Community climate is a key element in establishing psychosocial interventions for members of self-help/mutual aid groups
- Main concepts of Community Psychology (C.P.) (e.g. empowerment, diversity, communal procedures, self-help/mutual aid) and the methodologies that C.P. suggests, are of primal importance
- Critical aspects of Community Psychology serve as an alternative background for the critical aspects that members of self-help/ mutual aid groups often propose (e.g. horizontal / collaborative relationships with the experts, criticism of medicalization)

# Lessons learned

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The above mentioned results serve as the methodology of Self Help Promotion Program until today and they are adequate for the support of people with addiction problems that participate or are willing to participate to a self-help/ mutual aid group.

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This methodology has elements that can contribute to the wider conversation regarding the confrontation of addiction problems, but adaptations/ changes are probably needed

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Participation is not a panacea. The values, the means and the targets of each intervention play a considerable role, along with the central role of service users.

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Methodologies that utilize the dynamic of SH/MAGs are important especially at an era that movements of service users are acknowledged. So, there is a need for innovative methodologies that combine the advantages of professional psychosocial interventions and SH/MAGs

# Lessons learned

- Shift in the model of support:
- Change of the traditional model of help provision (active expert – passive recipient).
- To a model that health practitioners are coworkers and co-creators of the intervention along with the directly involved (members of self help groups)
- New roles for health practitioners and social scientists in the field of addiction emerge. Roles that utilize ideas and practices from the fields of Liberation Psychology and Critical Community Psychology (Kagan et al, 2011, Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002, Watkins, 2019)
- *The role of professionals in dealing with addiction: Humphreys, K. (2015). Addiction treatment professionals are not the gatekeepers of recovery. Substance use & misuse, 50(8-9), 1024-1027*

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Thank you!

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