**Chapter Four**

**Oppression and Liberation**

1. **Introduction**

The central problem with which community psychology is concerned with is oppression, and its central goal is liberation and wellbeing of disadvantaged people. Community psychologists are concerned with the issue and problems disadvantaged people are facing that have historical roots like pain and suffering, dislocation, and colonization, oppression and marginalization.

Society has constructed stories about disadvantaged people. When we listen to stories, the pain and suffering of disadvantaged people we often feel shocked, hurt, angry, guilty and/defensive and many of us want to do something to correct the injustice that people have suffered.

**Community psychology** aimed at helping disadvantaged people to tell their stories so that dominant cultural narratives imposed on them can be challenged and alternative factual stories can be promoted. The core of oppression is power inequality which exists between individuals, groups, communities or societies.

* 1. **Meaning and Nature of Oppression**

Oppression occurs in a hierarchical relationship in which a dominant group unjustly holds power and resources and withholds them from another group (Prilleltensky, 2008; Tatum, 1997; Watts, Williams, & Jagers, 2003). Themore powerful group is termed the dominant or privileged group; the less powerful is the oppressed or subordinated group.

Oppressive hierarchies are often based on ascribed characteristics fixed at birth or otherwise outside personal control (e.g., gender or race).For example, oppressive systems in the USA create a privileged group of Whites and subordinate groups of all others, including Native Americans.

Oppressive systems may also create intermediate groups. For example, South African apartheid and British colonialism in India created classes such as “colored” South Africans and“ Anglo Indians”—subordinated by the dominant class but more privileged than the lowest classes (Sonn & Fisher, 2003, 2010).

Class privilege operates along a continuum in many Western societies; middle classes are more privileged thanthose with lowest incomes, but they are still less powerful and often manipulated by the wealthy. In U.S. history, some immigrant groups were only gradually accepted by dominant Anglo American groups.

The dominant group may controlled resources including economic resources, status and influence, sociopolitical power, interpersonal connections among elites, the power to frame discussion of conflicts (often exerted through media and educational systems), representation in political and corporate offices, and even inequalities in marriage and personal relationships. Perhaps most insidious are ideologies and myths to convince members of subordinated groups that they actually are inferior (McDonald, Keys, & Balcazar, 2007). This sense of inferiority is termed **internalized oppression**.

Members of privileged groups are granted resources, opportunities, and power not by their own efforts but by oppressive systems (McIntosh, 1998).Members of a privileged class may not recognize or consent to this, but they are granted the privileges anyway. In the USA, many White persons oppose racial discrimination, but they are privileged by systems that reliably produce these effects.

Subordinated groups are denied access to much power and many resources, without their consent. However, they are not powerless. They may resist injustice in many ways—direct and indirect. The strengths of their cultural heritage may provide resources for doing this. Subordinated groups may also develop ways of coping with oppression and protecting themselves. For example, women who are victims of battering often learn to interpret the nuances of their partners’ moods (Tatum, 1997). Persons with disabilities may remove themselves from oppressive environments. They may also create new narratives about themselves that challenge or reframe dominant cultural narratives discounting their capabilities and potential (McDonald, Keys, & Balcazar, 2007). The subordinated group may comply overtly with oppressors yet create personal identities revealed only with other members of their group, as “colored” South Africans did under apartheid (Sonn & Fisher, 1998, 2003).

* 1. **Some Contexts leading oppression**

Oppressive systems have long historical roots. Those systems, not individuals currently living within them, are the sources of injustice (Prilleltensky & Gonick, 1994; Freire, 1970/1993). However, the power relationships of the larger society are often mirrored at multiple ecological levels in macro systems, communities, organizations, micro systems, and individual prejudices (James et al., 2003; Prilleltensky, 2008).

The following conditions, and social contexts has direct or indirect role for oppression.

**Patriarchy**: the system of unearned male power, not individual men, is likely to be the opponent of women so that tend to be a root of oppression. Some however believes that patriarchy harms men as well as women—for example, by the emotional restriction and costly competitiveness of masculine role expectations. Watts (2010)indicated men are agents and targets of oppressive masculinity. He also shows how dismantling oppression may liberate privileged and oppressed from a system that dehumanizes both (see also Friere, 1970/1993; Mankowski & Maton, 2010).

In complex societies, multiple forms of oppression exist. Steele (1997)indicated that the best African American students are affected by racial stereotypes for they are not to be pure white; and the most mathematically talented women are similarly affected by stereotypes about women’s mathematical ability for they are to be women. Moreover, the same individual can be privileged by one system while subordinated by another. In the United States, Black men are oppressed by racism and privileged by sexism; White women are oppressed by sexism and privileged by racism; working-class and low-income White men are oppressed by socioeconomic classism, while privileged by racism and sexism. No one is free at all!

**Social Myths:** Oppressive hierarchies are sustained in part by widely accepted myths that rationalize oppressive system (Freire, 1970/1993; Prilleltensky& Nelson, 2002; Watts, 1994). We are more likely to place high value on the individual effort and capability—victim blaming mentality. This individualism-based oriented mentality lead us to reject the role that economic and social forces at various ecological levels exert on oppression and/or dominancy. The value we place on the individual channel our thinking so that we tend to interpret whether success or failure in terms of individual effort or ability. As a result, members of dominant groups and even subordinated groups often fail to recognize how systems of oppression are creating injustices. In fact, we are more often misguide by false reading of differences in educational attainment or income. Even if individual efforts do matter a great deal, it is also true that oppressive systems reward effort and ability among members of the privileged group while often ignoring the same qualities among members of the subordinated group.

An oppressive system often works best when a few members of an oppressed group break through to enjoy the privileges of the dominant group. They may be tokens accepted only to improve public relations, or perhaps they are the best at assimilating the values and behaviors of the dominant class. Their success seems to offer a lesson about the importance of individual effort, but it obscures a review of social conditions across levels of analysis. In addition, research shows that these token individuals are often placed in a bind—being held to higher performance standards than members of the privileged group(Ridgeway, 2001).

**The Role of Mass Media:**  Print media, television, movies, radio, and the Internet comprise a very influential macro system. Mass media often tend to provide misleading images of oppressed populations. For instance in Ethiopia, all governments Medias usually speak loudly about only development and renaissance while poverty is usually has to be concealed deliberately; the poor are ignored and has to die; unemployment has no one to mention it; the issue of economic inequality has no place either to be printed or displayed. Talking against injustice and opposing the government is absolutely taboo; for sure bold enough to label someone terrorist and throw un to the jail. To mention a few, Temesgen Dessalegn, Andualem Arage, Eskindir Nega, zone 9 bloggers, Ryot Alemu [she has released and now free after five years of imprisonment], Habtamu Ayalew, Abrha Desta… are among other thousands of political prisoners currently in jail just with has made no any fault but rather speaking against injustice.

Gilens (1996) investigated coverage of poverty in major U.S. news magazines, finding that while African Americans comprised less than one-third of persons living in poverty, every person pictured in news magazine stories about the “underclass” was African American. This bias had real effects: Public opinion polls cited by Gilens showed that U.S. citizens consistently overestimated the proportion of the poor who are Black.

**Institutional Oppression**: Organizational policies more likely to have discriminatory effects against women. Men talk more, make more suggestions, use more assertive speech and gestures, and influence group decisions more often. In fact, studies also indicate that both women and men accept male leaders who use these actions competently. But when women use these actions to lead assertively, the response is often different. Many men and even women feel discomfort, and emotional backlash is more likely to occur, even if not voiced openly. For example, assertive women managers are more likely to be considered hostile than equally assertive men (Heilman, 2001). The source of discomfort is that assertive women contradict subtle, socially constructed (and unjust) expectations about who can legitimately exercise these forms of power (Carli, 1999, 2003; Ridgeway,2001; Rudman & Glick, 2001).

This finding is, however, seems intentionally in support of women. Assertive women is not easy to get; to find influential women is challenging task as compared to their counterparts. This finding is not reasonable enough to conclude women are as assertive as men to use power; doesn’t reflect the fact on the ground. The fact is that men are more likely to be assertive and influential than their counterparts. Keep in mind that this doesn’t mean that women are powerless, but rather to say they are different—by talent, skill, competence, gift, and so on. Period.

**Intergroup Relations and Individual Prejudices:** Research on inter group relations demonstrates that humans often hold positive attitudes about own in-group while stereotyping and even holding prejudices about out-group members. Moreover, groups having ethnocentric feeling tend to believe their own way is best.

Members of both dominant and subordinated groups thus may hold stereotypes and prejudices about the other group. The effects of stereotypes and prejudices tend to be deferent across different persons. A person’s biases in a more powerful role (e.g., employer, teacher, police officer, or elected official), have greater effects on others. Members of privileged groups have more influence in their organizations, communities, and societies. Members of the subordinated group are not free of prejudices, but theirs are less powerful because their subordinated status limits their influence.

In Ethiopia, for the last 25 years Ethnic-based politics in which the TPLF group whom they represent the minority group has controlled the economic, political, and social institutions [for example access to political power, employment, housing, education, health care, investment opportunity, mortgages and loans, and other infrastructure] since 1991.

(Oren et al., 2005) indicates that ethnic-based governments primarily attempt to systematically control all instruments of power, such as security forces, land administrations, economic institutions, immigration center, legal (court) systems, cultural institutions, religious constitutions and others just to secure their dominancy with the pain of the subordinated group. They also pointed out if the minority ethnic group seized the power they ultimately work day and night to divide ethnic groups in to different parts and arose conflict between them to secure the power as long as possible.

* 1. **Social Inequalities and Poverty**

Community psychology values social justice and often examines social conditions and opportunities within community settings. Social inequality within and between communities may not be thought of as diversity. From community psychology viewpoint, social inequalities exist between relationships in which a lack of opportunity for education, work, or housing for a particular community or group needs to be compared to the overall availability of those opportunities within a locality and between localities. In other words, social inequities occur when there is lack of social and economic resources to subordinated group but available to the privileged group in effect the subordinated group denied opportunities for education, health care, or work and other important services for the quality of life. In more extreme cases, a group’s reduced its own social status can lead to group members having their property rights, voting rights, freedom of speech and assembly, and citizenship challenged.

* + 1. **Economic and social Marginalization**

Marginalization is a slippery and multi- layered concept. Whole societies can be marginalized at the global level, while classes and communities can be marginalized from the dominant social order. Similarly, ethnic groups, families and individuals can be marginalized within localities. Individuals and groups might enjoy high social statues at one point in time, but as social change takes place, they lose this status and become marginalized.

Peter Leonard (1984) is his book personality and ideology defines social marginality as “being outside the mainstream of productive activity and/or social productive activity”.

Marginalization is at the core of exclusion from fulfilling and full social lives at individual, interpersonal and societal levels.

**Poverty:** Poverty is not simply shortage of food. The World Bank report on the poor research project revealed that poverty is not just a lack of money but it is associated with hunger, illness, inadequate housing, illiteracy human rights abuses and social marginalization.

Impaired social support networks and social marginalization is relative or complete exclusion of marginalized people from social networks – their access to networks is denied. Marginalization then means reduced opportunity to link with others in common action to solve problems. The result can be described as *disempowerment*.

The whole Ethiopian history is significantly affected by drought and its related consequences. As evidences indicated that in the long history of Ethiopia poverty/famine[ረኃብ] due to drought, different epidemic disease [በሽታ]and our governors [ገዥዎቻችን] are major evils that devastates Ethiopians significantly. In addition ,the animals disease [which particularly kills animals and oxen] which becomes largely prevalent during the period of Minilik II, and later on his reign mainly from 1911 E.C and its following years, was the among the major chronic events adversely affect the people of Ethiopia.

Furthermore, recurrent drought and its related consequences continued in entire history of Ethiopia and exists until today because people perceived evil events such as disease, dictator rulers and drought as ***God’s punishment for wrong deeds of man***. Unfortunately, our people were, perhaps even today are not believed that the government is responsible to protect the well-being of people from drought and its related consequences. Professor Mesfin Woldemariam is the leading scholar who deeply studied draught and its consequences in Ethiopia.

He has challenged the wrong perception and attitude of people concerning drought and its related problems by carried out serious investigation and by using the opportunity he has in his hand. His Geography exhibition entitled *“Drought and its Consequences*” shown collection of pictures, and audios of affected people by drought and famine occurred in the province of Wollo in 1965 E.C was successfully change the attitude of the student. Following the day the students seen the Exhibition they demonstrated self-demonstration, and refused to enter to the class and began to act against the emperor—his tireless effort becomes real.

The emperor was trying to conceal the 1965 wollo drought not to be exposed to the public; hence the police were stop at Kotebe, north of Addis Ababa, the get of Wollo and Tigray people, to protect the hangers not to enter to the center of the capital of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa. However, at the end, the effort of the Emperor to conceal the drought becomes in vain. It is Professor Mesifin that exposed the drought to international public simply because after his “Exhibition”, the hanger’s pictures become distributed throughout the world in different ways (e.g. by Ethiopian Diasporas)so that the drought attracted the attention of print and electronic Medias as well, in the process the world public heard the news. Not only the 1965 drought, Prof. Mesifin was also the first to assist, by collecting food from Shewa province, people of province Tigray whom they were affected by famine in 1952 E.C following 1949 E.C drought happened in the area.

Despite the above efforts, Ethiopia is still the poorest country which has suffered from chronic food insecurity with recurrent drought. The report made by Gabriellla Meltzer 2016 G.C indicated that, no country has faced devastating consequences than Ethiopia, which is experiencing the worst drought in roughly half a century. The drought recurrent in Ethiopia due to El Nino of 2015-2016 year is among the worst of all. Despite the effort of the government of Ethiopia to present itself to the world as leading sub-Saharan Africa’s economic renaissance, Ethiopia remains desperately poor with a human development index of merely 0.4442 (, ranked 174th in the world. The country only reduced poverty by one-third by the close of the MDGs (millennium development growth), and nearly 96.5 million is living in multidimensional poverty. What a shame of all is that February 1, 2016, the government of Ethiopia and its aid partners have announced that they need a total of $1.4 billion in 2016 to address the current drought-induced crisis.

Someone may ask how a country government claiming 11 present annual economic growth for almost ten continuous years (i.e., from 2003―2012) could blatantly beg donor organizations and countries as well just in February 1, 2016. No government official could answer it!

* + 1. **Disadvantaged Children and Families**

This section focuses on how *community psychology* can help us to understand or reframe the principles, concepts, and contexts of *disadvantaged children and families* and how we can act on behalf of them to change and reduce their conditions of *marginalization* and *oppression.* Families are not static entities, as they move or journey through life they experience many developmental and situational transitions. These transitions result in a dynamic context for family life that presents both opportunities and challenges.

The reason focusing on children and families is that unlike most other groups in society, children are wholly dependent on others to meet their need. Within society, children are relegated to a subordinated position; they possess neither political nor economic power. Although children’s primary context is the family, their wellbeing is influenced by, and therefore, must also be understood in relation to forces operating at broader level of analysis.

In addition, disadvantage children and families lack a sense of control, monitor, choice, and opportunity over many aspects of their lives and are subordinate to others (i.e. they are *powerless*). Conversely, disadvantaged families that experience such an extreme lack of control can acquire power and assert authority over their own lives through the principle of power emphasizing on the values of *participation, self-determination*, and *social justice.* It is through the inter twinning of these *three* values that disadvantaged families can gain both *voice* and *choice.* Through its interdisciplinary ties, community psychologists are learning how to promote active participation of marginalized populations in the decision making processes.

Even though disadvantage is derived from many sources or factors (such as globalization and market expansion), but here it is the *impact of low-income or poverty* and its associated risks of such circumstances are considered to be the primary cause of disadvantage for families and children. In the last two decades of the 20th c the number of people living in poverty swelled to over *1.2 billion*, approximately 20% of the world’s population, and half of them were children.

As one of the structures of oppression, *containment* serves to intensify the *social isolation* experienced by disadvantaged families. These families are excluded and ostracized from participating in their communities due to their inability to pay for many services and opportunities such as recreational activities, summer camps and training courses.

The traditional approach to understanding disadvantaged families lead to ***victim blaming*** or *personal culpability* because it focused on micro level of analysis and looks either for difficulties within the family unit or within the particular family members. However, adopting a holistic perspective redirects our attention from *deficit-orientation* towards a focus on the strength of families living in adverse conditions. The value of holism focus on the whole family in the context of the relationships, settings, and environments for better understanding of disadvantaged families and children.

Although contemporary discourse reflects diversity and acknowledges the different types of families, conservative values dominate and non-traditional families continued to be rejected (Leonard, 1997) and discriminated against by policies and social norms (Eichler, 1997, Lindeman Nelson, 1997; Nicholson, 1997). To reduce discrimination against disadvantaged families, social, political, economic policies should be designed so that families will participate and be included in every affair of the community without any interference. Families cannot be judged against a single standard; they should have the right to be different and should not be made to suffer because of their differences.

Multi-focused community driven programs acknowledge the value of *holism,* recognizing that targeting on a single contributing factor is unlikely to address the complexity of cumulative and interacting variable leading to and perpetuating disadvantage. Drawing on the ecological principle, multi-focused programs also recognize that factors beyond the micro system, at the meso and macro levels to understand and reframe the conditions of disadvantaged families.

The principle of prevention, intervention, and promotion of the wellbeing of disadvantaged families can reflect their personal, collective, and rational dimensions. Promoting rational wellbeing requires that interventions, both in the personal and collective domains, respecting differences among disadvantaged families, allow families to define their needs, promote acceptance, and facilitate meaningful involvement of disadvantaged families in making decisions affecting their lives.

The psychological sense of community and social integration can be facilitated through the mechanisms of *inclusion* or connecting families to one another such as in blocks or neighborhood associations, community cooperatives, and religious congregations. Therefore, the relationship formed within these networks can provide families with a sense of belonging, emotional support, socialization, encouragement, and advice, tangible support such as childcare, money, clothing, meals, and transportation, as well as opportunities to reciprocate with support when others require assistance.

The means and opportunity to pursue healthy and satisfying life are bestowed through vehicles of social, economic and health policy. To address socio-economic inequalities and poverty and to promote the wellbeing of children and families, social interventions must be mounted at macro level to advocate and develop policies that will ensure a fairer and equal distribution of resources through cash benefits and tax transfers among all members of society, nationally and globally.

* 1. **Resistance and Liberation**

Social change often begins with disadvantaged people’s awareness and understanding of unjust psychological and sociopolitical circumstances oppressing them. Lord and Hutchison (1993) indicated that gaining awareness has multiple advantages in personal, relational and collective levels. Community psychology recognizes the injustice that disadvantaged people experience. It involves partnership to work in solidarity with disadvantaged people towards social change. To help create social change community psychologists reframe problems, listen to voices of disadvantaged people and make the invisible visible.

* 1. **The Liberation Perspective: A call to action**

Liberation in its fullest sense requires the securing of full human rights and the remaking of a society without roles of oppressor and oppressed.(Watts, Williams, & Jagers, 2003).

The idea of liberation was introduced by Paulo Freire (1970, 1973) who invoked freedom to convert silent acquiescence in to vocal discontent. The liberation perspective is not just an intellectual analysis; it is a call to action. It explains injustices and names an opponent: *the oppressive system*. It also provides an orientation for something positive to work toward. The aim is to change the system, to emancipate both the privileged and the oppressed(Friere, 1970/1993). First-order change in this context would mean the currently oppressed group simply replaces the currently privileged group in power—are shuffling within the oppressive system. Second-order change dismantles the oppressive system and its inequalities. That is the aim of liberation.

Members of subordinated groups usually understand the system of oppression better than those who are privileged by it. Frequent participation in relationships where one is privileged dulls the awareness of the privileged person, making injustices seem natural. But the same encounters can lead to insights by the subordinated. For example, European Americans are seldom forced to confront the existence of racism, while members of other racial groups have perhaps daily experience with it. This means that libratory efforts need leaders from the subordinated group to sustain awareness of where the real issues lie. Liberation also needs commitment from persons in privileged groups to work toward addressing oppression. According to Paulo Friere (1970/1993), an important theorist of liberation, holds that three resources are needed for dismantling oppression.

* Critical awareness and understanding of the oppressive system.
* Involvement and leadership from members of the subordinated group.
* Collective action; solely individual actions are difficult to sustain against powerful opposition. As Freire put it, nobody liberates anyone; no one is liberated by her or himself alone ((1970); liberation is a collaborative enterprise. The very definition of liberation implies collective action; always a relational endeavor.

During the 1990s, liberation psychology developed as a reflective practice, stressing the values, capacities and actions of oppressed people in fighting for their oppression. Liberation struggle led to processes of de-ideologization. Change and liberation cannot occur in the absence of psychological and political education. De-ideologizing and problematizing are political means of advancing liberation and well-being. **De-ideologizing** is a concept introduced by Paulo Freire (1970), people are not empty vessel (simple recipient of knowledge coming from outside). **Problmatazation**, is a cognitive process by *which people critically analyze their living circumstance and their role in shaping their fate*. Problematizing helps in challenging naturalizing processes.

In ***naturalization***, the status quo is regarded as a natural state of affairs, dictated by unseen and untouchable forces. People attribute the existing discrimination, oppression, and problems to some supernatural forces.

***Some general assumptions and concepts in oppression and the liberation perspective are:***

* + - 1. Oppression occurs in a hierarchical relationship in which a dominant group unjustly holds power and resources and withholds them from another group.
      2. The more powerful group is the dominant or privileged group; the less powerful is the Oppressed or subordinated group. A person’s group membership is often determined by birth or other factors beyond one’s personal control.
      3. Resources controlled by a dominant group may include economic resources, status and influence, sociopolitical power, interpersonal connections, and the power to frame public discussion of issues.
      4. The oppressive system grants unearned privileges to members of the dominant group—regardless of whether they recognize or consent to them.
      5. The oppressed group resists oppression—directly or indirectly—with the power they have.
      6. Multiple forms of oppression exist. An individual may be privileged by one form of oppression and subordinated by another.
      7. Oppression involves multiple ecological levels: macro systems, localities, organizations, interpersonal relationships, and individual prejudices.
      8. Social myths rationalize an oppressive system. Then, the workings of the oppressive system seem natural.
      9. Because they experience its consequences directly, members of the oppressed group often understand an oppressive system better than members of the dominant group.
      10. Any individual may have prejudices, but those of the dominant group are more damaging because they interlock with the power of oppressive systems.
      11. Liberation theory is a call to action to work collectively to dismantle oppressive systems.
      12. Oppression dehumanizes both oppressor and oppressed. To truly dismantle it, those who oppose it must aim to liberate both the oppressed group and the dominant group from the oppressive system.
  1. **Some Roles of Community Psychology to free the Oppressed**

**Investigating sources of inequality and intervention:** Community psychologists may investigate the consequences of different social conditions for individuals’ education attainment, disparities in disease and health, and a variety of social issues. They may also focus on addressing social inequities in their intervention work as a primary means of promoting well-being and adaptive functioning for individuals of the group identified as experiencing the inequities. Addressing social inequities can be a powerful way of linking the well-being of individuals and communities.

**Participatory democracy:** The role of psychologists is to inform the value of participatory

democracy when the participants openly reflect their opinion on the decision making.

**Linking the global and the local:** international organization both governmental and nongovernmental, national organization, community based organization, and citizens all need to be linked in new form of network and partnership if the material and social needs of the worlds of poor are to be adequately addressed.

**Protecting basic human right:** economic development cannot be proceeding fully unless it is accompanied by civil liberties such as freedom of assembly and speech.

**Facilitating partnership**: the notion of partnership implies equality, or at least an intention to work on an egalitarian basis. A partnership may be forged for a particular time-limited purpose, such as a grant application or on a long-term basis of shared interests.