

# Clinical Health Psychologist and Epidemiologist

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Please describe the area of psychology you practice.

I am a clinical health psychologist and epidemiologist by training, but I often find myself in the role of a community psychologist. My day-to-day activities are very diverse and change every day, sometimes even within the same day. My work also requires that I wear multiple hats as a scientist-practitioner, community advocate, leader, mentor, and educator. Among my daily activities, these include:

- a) teaching and mentoring the future generation of interdisciplinary scientists on the use of community engaged science to inform and advance health equity and social justice for marginalized communities.
- b) conducting research studies using community engaged science; these projects vary in topic and stage with some projects being in the planning and data collection stages while others are in more advance stages, such as publication and dissemination of findings.
- c) building and maintaining community partnerships; for example building an alliance of Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) to identify common areas of interest to undertake collaborative projects to address the health needs of the community
- d) attending lots of meetings to address issues related to administration, advocacy, fundraising, and a lot of other things.
- e) media interviews that come up and often happen suddenly and require a fast response

I also spend my days writing and reading to keep up with current events that influence the health and wellbeing of the communities that I work with. My work also involves quite a lot of travelling to visit research sites, attend and present at conferences, and to build new partnerships. In short, my work is a fascinating mix of adventures that keep me motivated and learning new things and meeting fascinating people along the way.

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**Were there specific factors that led you to choose this area of psychology?  
Was there a critical moment that changed your career trajectory?**

My career path is non-traditional. I began my PhD at age 39 after having raised a family. I married at age 16, and I had two kids by the time I was 19; thus, education was not a priority, particularly as a new non-English speaking immigrant with limited financial resources. After some years of cleaning offices at night and carpooling kids during the day, I realized that education was the way to advance the social ladder. Thus, I attended remedial classes for several years at a community college, and then transferred to a distance education program through which I obtained a BA. To make money on the side, I worked as a research assistant doing Spanish translations in a community clinic that provided health screens to immigrant families with limited financial resources. It was there that the seed began to grow and has continued to grow ever since. Having the privilege to be in constant connection with people in the community provides me with opportunities to learn from diverse lived experiences and collective wisdom so that I can be a better scientist, practitioner, and person.

**What advice would you give to an ECP who wants to pursue a position or additional training opportunities in this area of psychology?**

The best advice I could give to another ECP is to find their passion by reflecting upon their history, who they are, and how their lived experiences can be used to make a difference in the world or in communities that resonate with them. Also important is to make an inventory of their talents and skills because this will make their life easier.

I often tell my students to find a “why” to the work that they do and to look for the “where” does the “why” comes from. Once a person becomes grounded in critical consciousness, the path becomes easier to see. Sometimes the answers come in the middle of the night . . . it is those voices that wake you up because there is an exciting day ahead regardless of how busy it may be. In terms of training, I recommend stepping out of the comfort zone and exploring interdisciplinary fields. For me, I found that by taking courses and working with colleagues in public health, policy studies, biomedical sciences, medical humanities, and medicine. Learning how different disciplines approach similar issues is crucial to expanding your perspective on an issue and helps you become a well-rounded and innovative scientist . . . plus you are never be bored!

