

# **MULTIPLE - AND OFTEN CONFLICTING- ROLES OF COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH WORKERS IN RURAL CHIAPAS, MEXICO**

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**Background:** Community Mental Health Workers (CMHWs) play a vital role in bridging the gap in mental healthcare in rural Mexico (1). Compañeros en Salud (CES), a global health nonprofit, has implemented a CMHW program to bring quality mental healthcare to populations in rural Chiapas Mexico (2). Although this model has been successful, CMHWs have encountered challenges fulfilling their unique duties as providers.

**Issues of Focus:** CMHWs' identities often seem to be in conflict with each other: they are "insiders" (as community members) and "outsiders" (as mental healthcare providers working for an outside organization). They are women, rarely occupying a status of power, yet their employers expect them to navigate their neighborhoods with authority. Despite the challenges inherent in occupying such a mosaic of identities, the CMHW model has had notable success in bringing mental healthcare to populations in Chiapas.

**Proposition:** We will present a composite case study illustrating barriers encountered by CMHWs serving rural communities in Chiapas, Mexico: a) garnering trust from both the community and their employer, and b) being treated with respect by community members while maintaining a congenial connection with them. We will present a short interview with a CMHW discussing her experience navigating these identities while carrying out her duties.

**Potential Outcomes:** We aim to highlight cultural challenges encountered by CMHWs as members of the CES mental healthcare team and how both the community members and their employer may push them to "pick a side." We intend to show that CMHWs sidestep such dichotomous views and find comfort in occupying these roles while delivering mental health services.

**Discussion:** Listening to CMHW's perspectives improves understanding of the challenges to providing mental healthcare to rural populations in Chiapas. Organizations can learn how to support CMHWs by purposefully avoiding situations that make the CMHWs "choose" either the community or the employer.

## **Learning Objectives**

At the conclusion of this presentation, participants will be able to:

1. Describe the multiple and seemingly contradictory roles that CMHWs play in rural Mexico.
2. Explain two ways that CMHWs have navigated these challenges and learn how organizations can support CMHWs accept their multiple roles while delivering mental health care.