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Innovating healthcare delivery for newly arrived migrants through community participation, visual expressions of people's stories and learning alliance

Migratory experiences often exacerbate the mental health care needs of vulnerable migrants and refugees. Mental health services access and provision, therefore, need to be adaptive to the specific needs of these populations. Thus, development and promotion of these types of services require that migrants be not only at the heart of physical and mental health delivery models but also be able to influence them. My Health project, a thirty-six months initiative oriented to identify health needs of newly arrived migrants – women and children in various European cities, is implementing innovative participatory methodological strategies. The aim is to move from a consultative process to a more participatory and inclusive one in the access/provision of health services. Preliminary findings regarding the innovative strategies used by My Health, namely community participation activities, visual expressions of people's stories and a stakeholder learning alliance, show that professionals involved are increasingly aware of a) the need to develop better networks with diverse communities, b) the importance of conscious participatory design that moves beyond consultation with migrants through research, and c) the need to recognise and bolster the role of migrant professionals. Furthermore, by using pictograms health and mental health professionals are mastering new ways to communicate effectively using images, reducing a high reliance on verbal language. Lastly through the learning alliance, professionals and researchers are becoming aware of how involving a more comprehensive network can increase the impact of their work on a broader range of stakeholders. Overall both the intended and unintended results of the innovative strategies used by My Health—an initiative supported by the European Commission, so far are demonstrating creative ways to be used when engaging with mental and physical service delivery for newly arrived migrants.

Biography

Sheena Vella, MSc. is a social and cultural psychologist and has worked in the field of migration for the past 7 years in Malta and the U.K. Her photovoice research on the social representations of asylum seeking and the future in Malta was awarded a distinction from the Institute of Social & Cultural Psychology at the London School of Economics & Political Science. She has worked at the University of Malta, within government open centres for asylum seekers, and the NGO and voluntary sector. She is currently co-ordinator of the Integration and Community Development activities at Migrants Resource Centre in London. She is particularly interested in empowerment and development models of migrant and refugee women, development of transcultural competencies and social justice.

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