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Thesis Title:

Community mobilization and social determinants of health. A participatory action research project exploring the social determinants of health and ways of tackling them through community based activities in the slum “Villa 31” in Buenos Aires city, Argentina.

Key words: slum, community participation, social determinants of health

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Abstract:

The expansion of slums in a global level influences the health of a big percentage of people. Civil society organizations play an important role in mobilizing the slum dwellers and in tackling the social determinants of health (SDH).

This study focuses on the strategies that are employed by a social movement “Movimiento Popular la Dignidad” (MPLD) in the slum “Villa 31” of Buenos Aires in order to tackle the social determinants of health of the slum. It is a participatory action research project, which focuses on simultaneous action and research in a participative manner. It utilises methods of participant observation, of participatory education workshops and of interviews. The community members are involved in the project, both as research subjects and as researchers themselves.

It was found that the social movement operates a community health center in the slum recruited by local community health promoters and implements a number of small-scale infrastructural projects that aim to improve the living standards of the

dwellers. MPLD approaches healthcare access as a human right and attempts to provide proper medical attention to the slum dwellers using as forms of action health campaigns, home visits and accountability strategies that promote community awareness around health issues in the slum. Education activities and intersectoral actions between the CHC and the other activities of MPLD focus on creating links between health and its social determinants. MPLD tries to tackle all the main of health determinants through community-based projects, subsidized by the government of Buenos Aires. The active participation of the community health promotes in the community health centre and in MPLD has influenced the way they think of health and SDH. Community participation and mobilization of people around health issues is connected to the concept of health. Improvement of the SDH is connected to self-organisation, to constant political struggle and to exerting pressure onto the government to enforce the implementation of a slum-upgrading program.

MPLD perceives health as one of the many sectors in which action must be taken in order to accomplish a just society. Health is approached as a means to create a fair socioeconomic system and not as an end in itself. The concept of social *determination* of health is introduced, opposed to the concept of social *determinants* of health, that highlights the necessity of a more holistic approach of health which illustrates the mechanisms that the current socioeconomic system influences health.