

## Sense of Community, Community Participation and Empowerment in Barranquilla, Colombia



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### SUMMARY

*Sense of community is a key concept for community psychology and influences empowerment and participation at individual, organizational and community levels. These categories offering multiple alternatives to articulate processes of change and social transformation. The aim of the research is getting to measure the sense of community, level of empowerment and community participation that the inhabitants of a group of neighborhoods present, but with a special feature: manifesting their desire to change their place of residence. Study had 1,334 participants from Barranquilla (595 men, 739 women). For data collection were used: "Sense of Community Index 2 (SCI-2)", "Empowerment Scale of Zimmerman and Zahniser" and "Community Participation scale of Speer and Paterson" scales. A sense of community, empowerment and participation was found that tends to be low or medium. A positive albeit slight correlation was found between these three variables. The Sense of community, empowerment and participation were recorded as low at a general level, but these present even lower levels in women and among those who live in rented places. People who have openly expressed their interest in moving out of the place where they currently live, there is a low level of sense of community, empowerment, and community participation.*

**Keywords:** *Sense of community, community empowerment, community participation, measurement scales, changing place of residence, cross-sectional study.*

## Sentido de Comunidad, Participación y Empoderamiento comunitarios en Barranquilla, Colombia

### RESUMEN

El sentido de comunidad es un concepto clave para la psicología comunitaria e influye en el empoderamiento y la participación a nivel individual, organizacional y comunitario. Estas categorías ofrecen múltiples alternativas para articular procesos de cambio y transformación social. El objetivo de la investigación es medir el sentido de comunidad, nivel de empoderamiento y participación comunitaria que presentan los habitantes de un conjunto de barrios, pero con una característica especial: manifiestan su deseo de cambiar de lugar de residencia. El estudio contó con 1.334 participantes de Barranquilla (595 hombres, 739 mujeres). Para la recolección de datos se utilizaron las escalas "Sense of Community Index 2 (SCI-2)", "Empowerment Scale de Zimmerman y Zahniser" y "Community Participation scale de Speer y Paterson". Se encontró un sentido de comunidad, empoderamiento y participación que tiende a ser bajo o medio. Se encontró una correlación positiva, aunque ligera, entre estas tres variables. El sentido de comunidad, empoderamiento y participación se registraron como bajos a nivel general, pero estos presentan niveles aún más bajos en las mujeres y entre quienes viven en lugares alquilados. En las personas que han expresado abiertamente su interés en mudarse del lugar donde viven actualmente existe un bajo nivel de sentido de comunidad, empoderamiento y participación comunitaria.

**Palabras clave:** Sentido de comunidad, empoderamiento comunitario, participación comunitaria, escalas de medición, cambiar lugar de residencia, estudio transversal.

## Sentido de Comunidade, Participação e Empoderamento comunitários em Barranquilla, Colômbia

### RESUMO

O senso de comunidade é um conceito chave para a psicologia comunitária e influencia o empoderamento e a participação em nível individual, organizacional e comunitário. Essas categorias oferecem múltiplas alternativas para articular processos de mudança e transformação social. O objetivo da pesquisa é medir o senso de comunidade, nível de empoderamento e participação comunitária apresentados pelos habitantes de um conjunto de bairros, mas com uma característica especial: manifestam o desejo de mudar de local de residência. O estudo contou com 1.334 participantes de Barranquilla (595 homens, 739 mulheres). Para a coleta de dados, foram utilizadas as escalas "Sense of Community Index 2 (SCI-2)", "Empowerment Scale de Zimmerman e Zahniser" e "Community Participation scale de Speer e Paterson". Foi encontrado um senso de comunidade, empoderamento e participação que tende a ser baixo ou médio. Encontrou-se uma correlação positiva, embora leve, entre essas três variáveis. O senso de comunidade, empoderamento e participação foram registrados como baixos em nível geral, mas estes apresentam níveis ainda mais baixos nas mulheres e entre aqueles que vivem em locais alugados. Nas pessoas que expressaram abertamente seu interesse em mudar do local onde vivem atualmente, existe um baixo nível de senso de comunidade, empoderamento e participação comunitária.

**Palavras-chave:** *Senso de comunidade, empoderamento comunitário, participação comunitária, escalas de medição, mudar de local de residência, estudo transversal.*

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## Introduction

In Latin America, one of the most developed fields within social psychology and, in general, the vast and prolific science of psychology, has been community social psychology. Its development has not only occurred due to the interventions that it has generated, but also in the strengthening of important theoretical and conceptual developments, which have been welcomed by psychology itself or successfully absorbed by sciences such as sociology, anthropology, and political science. It is also true that community psychology has been influenced by these social sciences.

The fundamental purpose of this development is due to extra-theoretical motivations associated with the challenge of overcoming the social problems that have historically accompanied Latin American populations, referring above all to the conditions of poverty and marginality and represented by variables such as low health coverage, basic sanitation, deficiencies in drinking water, high morbidity and mortality, malnutrition, deficiencies in the physical infrastructure of houses, low educational coverage and deficiency in the quality of education, illiteracy, high unemployment figures, among many others (FAO, 2023; Gómez Buendía, 1998; Reygadas, 2008; Amarante, 2013; ECLAC 2019).

Difficulties that have accompanied this group of countries, due to a variety of reasons, such as dependency, corruption, the adoption of wrong macroeconomic models or a myriad of anthropological, historical, or psychological determinants, have in turn been a handicap for the forging of a context that seeks diverse alternatives while overcoming these social difficulties.

Mahlert (2021) argues that the problems faced by people in their daily lives - such as limited access to employment, education, health and, in general, to decent living conditions - have motivated the creation of social models supposedly aimed at building fairer and more inclusive societies. However, these proposals, although well-intentioned, often remain at the theoretical or idealistic level. One example is Max Neef's so-called "Human Scale Development", which is presented as an alternative for working with poor communities, but whose practical application and real effectiveness in transforming such conditions remains a matter of debate.

Many concepts derive from social sciences and particularly from community psychology that would support this hypothesis referring to the fact that precisely the context has promoted processes of change and social transformation.

Several authors in the field of social sciences, and in particular community psychology, insist that context is a key factor in the processes of social change (Montero, 2003; Escovar, 1980; Rey, 2004; Martín-Baró, 2006). However, this statement, although frequently repeated, tends to remain a generality that is not very operative. On the other hand, other researchers such as Ospino (1993), Amar and Madarriaga (2008), Marín et al. (2005), and Garcés and Palacio (2010) highlight the relevance of the theoretical-conceptual framework in social interventions, as if the mere elaboration of models were sufficient to have an impact on reality. The truth is that, beyond these formulations, there is still a considerable gap between academic discourse and the actual effectiveness of interventions in the field.

### *Sense of community*

There is a category that emerges with enormous importance in the community social psychology's work. This concept analyzes that, for people registered in a particular context, an affiliation with the community where they live arises and in turn, affections are born that lead them to live together harmoniously and to be able to respond to the problems that affect them. These generated ties could well be shared by many members of a human collective or by some of its members.

This concept refers to what is known as "sense of community", a term originally presented by Sarason (1974) and which, after registering its scope, would be understood as a link that unites the social dimension represented by the immediate context, this is, the community, and the psychological and subjective dimension of human beings.

With this term the deepest feeling of people in relation to the close context in which they live is amalgamated. From this it is easy to deduce that, if this feeling is high, it will act as a strength to improve the conditions of this specific group and this in turn will result in well-being for the people who live in it. On the contrary, a low sense of community will affect people's desire not only to solve their problems, but even to live in a particular place. That is why it is important for the change agent to generate tangible processes around this construct.

Originally, Sarason (1974), explains what sense of community is: according to him, it is a perception of integrality with others, a feeling of trust, and a feeling that one is important to other people, all of this being a subjective experience.

Others consider that the sense of community has a special connection with a kind of hope that makes one feel secure in the group to which one belongs and that there is also reciprocity between the members that comprise it (McMillan and Chavis, 1986).

The reflection on the part of several authors is to establish if the sense of community really continues to be an important dimension for people and if it continues to guide their lives, expecting support from their community and at the same time contributing to it, or, on the contrary, for various reasons, is this feeling of belonging, security, reciprocity and mutualism with the community where one lives, increasingly an abstraction and not a concrete reality? (Putnam, 2000; Távora Vásquez, 2012; Haim-Litevsky et al., 2023).

This last perspective, which is part of a negative view of the contribution of a certain community in the construction of human beings, is associated with the changes that have taken place in society in recent years, such as industrialization, increased population density and displacement of people looking for job opportunities, all of which causes uprooting.

Undoubtedly these facts and others affect the sense of community that people can have, leading to feelings of loneliness, isolation and not belonging.

There are other positions that simply affirm that what before was considered community has changed, precisely because of the dynamics that are operating in today's globalized society. From this point of view, not only can one speak of community to refer to a geographical territory, but also to a virtual network of friends.

Accordingly, not only do human beings belong to a community, but they are usually also part of many of them. That is to say that the concept of “sense of community”, denoted by the feeling and perception that we are part of a group that helps us define ourselves should no longer be seen from one perspective, but from multiple ones (Távora Vásquez, 2012; Haim-Litevsky et al., 2023).

In this sense, the definitions that the concept assumes are varied: on one hand, people can identify with a group that they know totally or partially or that they simply do not know at all, at least physically, since relationships occur virtually; however, there may be a high level of sense of community in there. On the other hand, a person may feel that he or she is part of a group, which may be his or her neighborhood, workplace, or immediate surroundings, and the same expressions of the sense of community are not generated in it.

This discussion recalls the old distinction made by Cartwright and Zander (2001), between what were called membership groups and reference groups. Membership groups are the ones of which one is a part, at least physically, but with which people do not necessarily identify, while with the reference groups there is a high identification, and they contribute to the definition of the identity of people. In any case, given the polarity that the concept of sense of community has, whether it is accepted that it has been blurred as a conceptual category in people and therefore in groups, or it is understood that it has been changing due to the dynamics that accompany any social process, what seems to be clear is that it represents a very important element that guides the psychosocial accompaniment processes, since it serves as an operational element by allowing in a more or less simple way to measure how much, for example, people feel that they are part of a community.

But at the same time, starting from this measure, it is possible to establish if the human beings who are part of a group are influenced by their codes and ways of perceiving and understanding the world. It also allows inferring whether the behaviors of someone influence and affect the life and dynamics of the group. Likewise, the concept makes it possible to establish if the group to which one belongs is meeting the needs of its members and is allowing the sharing of the values and expectations of people, which are so important for both the group and its members. Finally, it can be inferred that there is an emotional connection with the group or community to which one belongs, this being the result of living or sharing in a prolonged way in a place or group.

All this is precisely what is found in the model of McMillan and Chavis (1986), which made it possible to understand the sense of community through four categories: sense of belonging to the group, reciprocal influence of the group and its members, satisfaction of personal needs and emotional connection with group members. From this theoretical model, innumerable studies have been carried out to know the relationship that the sense of community can have with a significant number of variables such as: perceived self-efficacy (Vega and Pereira, 2012; Moisseron-Baudé et al., 2022), quality of life (Hombrados Mendieta and López Espigares, 2014), social networks (Jariego 2004), among others; this being a very promising concept not only from a theoretical point of view, but also to support psychosocial accompaniment processes.

### *Community empowerment*

Another important concept that has been accompanying the work of community psychology can be observed in the proposals of Montero (2003): because of them this field of social psychology has been interested in the development of communities in contexts of poverty, the fundamental objective being the achievement of higher levels of development in people from vulnerable social contexts.

Community development would be understood as people having greater control over their own life circumstances and being able to face and solve their problems and, in a word, achieve empowerment over their surroundings.

According to Rappaport (1987), promoter of this construct, empowerment establishes the degree to which people exercise control or leadership over their context, being able to face and move forward in the face of difficulties that their lives may go through at one point.

Conforming to Montero (1980), and following this same perspective, community work would be associated with reversing the control that certain power groups outside the community have, causing it to be transferred to people and families from the immediate context that is being accompanied.

The foregoing implies a fundamental change in the paradigm of community intervention, from an accompaniment conceived in favor of external interests to an internal one considering the needs of the group that is object of the intervention.

Furthermore, from this point of view, at least four main aspects are identified: a. leadership must be exercised with the participation of all social actors and not with a part of them; b. one must work through felt needs and not normative needs; c. the accompaniment work should emphasize the achievement of increasing levels of community development; d. finally, the processes must be long-term and not conjunctural and / or reactionary.

Of course, empowerment is used for various purposes both in community work and in work related to community clinic and mental health, where interesting models have been established whose purposes have been aimed at objectives as diverse as addictions (Peterson and Reid, 2003), women victims of abuse (Mesa Peluffo and Ramellini Centella, 2006) and burnout (Greco, Laschinger, & Wong, 2006), just to mention some areas of intervention.

Strengthening is derived from the concept of empowerment. Hombrados et al. (2001) analyzed the concept of empowerment in community intervention and concluded that it is linked to personal power, a sense of control over one's own life, community participation and access to resources. However, although the term is presented as a complex and multilevel construction - supposedly applicable to both individuals and organizations - in practice its use is often ambiguous and overly idealized. The notion of "empowerment" has ended up becoming a catch-all label that, beneath its technical appearance, often hides the lack of concrete results or the difficulty of operating on the power structures that perpetuate inequality.

The concept is also developed with the intention of broadening the scope of community intervention and provides important practical guidelines aimed at increasing community power.

The empowerment of community intervention is observed as a model that leads to increasing the resources of people and communities in a dynamic way, considering a series of intervention principles that have to do with recognizing the right of individuals to be different, developing a condition of dominance over their own lives, and participating in community life.

### *Community participation*

On the other hand, a reiterated concept from this practical theoretical field of community psychology is that participation, which can be understood as a quality that a community reaches, characterized by



the commitment of the people who are part of a collective to facing its problems and social dynamics. The existence of levels of participation guarantees in good form the processes of change and social transformation.

That said, if it is a matter of undertaking a process of community social development, the search for participation must occur from the very moment in which contact with the community is made and must be present as a purpose in each of the tasks that are tackled, from the diagnosis, through the implementation of any modification and reaching the evaluation, monitoring and systematization processes (Marín Escobar et al., 2024; Hombrados et al., 2001).

From this perspective, the present study aims to establish how much sense of community, empowerment and community participation are affected among those who want to change their place of residence and if there are differences between the positive and negative reasons to move.

The working hypothesis formulated asserts that these variables are lower among people who want to move from the place where they live and among those subjects who show negative motives to move / change their place of residence. Furthermore, it is proposed that there is a correlation between sense of community, empowerment, and participation.

### **Materials and methods**

Type of research and design: Cross-sectional descriptive research was carried out with the application of surveys that responded to a selective descriptive design (Montero and León, 2002; Ato, López and Benavente, 2013).

**Population and participants:** The study was directed to 1,334 people of legal age (595 men, 739 women), with a mean age of 30.62 DT 14,165 and a range of 18 to 90 years, inhabitants of 27 neighborhoods of Barranquilla, Colombia (DANE, 2021). The participants, from different social strata, were selected through an intentional non-probabilistic sampling and expressed the intention to move from their neighborhood (change their place of residence).

### **Instruments:**

- a. **Sense of community index 2 (SCI-2):** Evaluates the dimensions of “Satisfaction of needs”, “Integration”, “Belonging and Emotional connection” (Chavis and Acosta, 2007). The instrument has 24 items with four response options: Not at all (0); a bit (1); a lot (2) and Completely (3). On this scale, a low sense of community is considered to exist in people who score between 0 and 32; medium if they score between 33 and 65 and high if the choices allow scores between 66 and 96.
- b. **Psychological Empowerment Scale (Zimmerman and Zahniser, 1991):** Made up of five items with four response options ranging from Not at All Agree (1) to Strongly Agree (4). The level of empowerment is considered low if the score is between 5 and 10; medium between 11 and 16 and high between 17 and 20.
- c. **Community Participation Scale (Speer and Peterson, 2000a):** It is made up of five items that are answered Never (1); Occasionally (2); Once a Year (3); Monthly (4) and Weekly (5). The level of community participation is considered low if the score is between 5 and 11; medium between 12 and 18 and high between 19 and 25.
- d. **Sociodemographic information:** sociodemographic data were obtained such as the place of residence, name of the neighborhood, sex, length of time in the community, residence in own or rented house,

level of education, age, wishes to move, satisfaction with life and political conviction. Each of them allowed making comparisons with the study variables. Satisfactory indicators of Cronbach's Alpha were obtained, registering indices of 0.950 on the sense of community scale, 0.810 on the empowerment scale and 0.882 on the community participation scale.

**Data collection and analysis:** The sample of this research was taken from the responses of 4249 participants who were part of a study on sense of community between 2016 and 2019: they responded in person to a survey in a paper booklet after signing the informed consent. Through a convenience sampling, 1,334 people were selected, 595 men (44.60%) and 739 women (55.40%) expressing the intention of moving to another neighborhood. After the application of the measurement scales, the tabulations of the instruments were made in an Excel database, which was then switched to the software SPSS version 24. For the analysis of the results, a description of the frequency and percentages of the following variables was first made reasons for changing residence, sense of community and importance of it, psychological empowerment, and community participation. Each of these variables was grouped into the categories low, medium, and high, adopting a classification criterion in accordance with what is established by the scales used. Additionally, comparisons of means by groups were made using non-parametric tests based on grouping variables such as sex, socioeconomic status, life satisfaction and political participation, and, to enrich the analysis, cross tables were also used.

## Results

The first aspect that was analyzed has to do with the motives of the study participants to change their place of residence. Among these motivations there are positive and negative ones. Invariably the positive reasons are related to improving the quality of life, while the negative ones are associated with harmful aspects of their current environment. As can be seen in Table 1, 34.9% of the participants, equivalent to 465 people, want to move to another neighborhood to achieve greater personal or family development. On the other hand, 368 people say that they want to move because the house where they live is distant from their place of study or work. Another group of people mention negative reasons for changing residence such as insecurity in the sector (143 inhabitants), inadequate infrastructure in the neighborhood (117 people), high costs of public services (83 neighbors), poor coexistence with neighbors (61 inhabitants), neighborhood infrastructure problems (61 people) or environmental pollution associated with noise, dust, or traffic (33 neighbors) (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Reasons for changing place of residence

REASONS FOR MOVING	Frequency	Percentage
For personal or family development (construction of own home, travel, for not continuing to pay rent)	465	34,90%
Too far from work or study	368	27.6%
Insecurity, homelessness, micro-trafficking in the neighborhood	143	10.7%
Housing infrastructure (small size, absence of parking, lack of services, no administration, no access for the disabled).	117	8.8%
High utility costs and taxes	83	6.2%
Problems or bad coexistence with neighbors	61	4.6%
Neighborhood infrastructure problems (Unpaved streets, poor lighting, no parks, streams.	61	4.6%



High environmental pollution from noise, dust, traffic.	33	2.5%
Not answer	3	2,00%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1334</b>	<b>0,37</b>
<b>SENSE OF COMMUNITY</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>100,00</b>
Low	767	57.5%
Medium	493	37.0%
High	74	5.5%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1334</b>	<b>100,00</b>

Note: Own elaboration, (2020).

Regarding the sense of community, most of the participants were said to have a low sense of community, equivalent to 57.5%, while 37% of the people studied reported a medium sense of community. Only 5.5% of the observed subjects presented a high sense of community (Table 1).

Despite this low rating, most of the members of the study (67.3%) consider that the Sense of community is important to their lives, placing their answers in the categories “Very important”, “Important” or “Somewhat important”. On the contrary, only 12.6% of them offer a response of disinterest towards it, expressing not wanting to be part of their environment or neighborhood or simply stating that it is an unimportant matter (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Importance of the sense of community for the participants

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
I prefer not to be part of this community	55	4.1%
Nothing important	113	8.5%
Not so important	267	20.0%
Something important	350	26.2%
Important	394	29.5%
Very importante	155	11.6%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1334</b>	<b>100%</b>

Note: Own elaboration, (2020).

Analyzing the capacity of people to face the problems of a community or territory, a variable defined as empowerment, the following results are observed: less than 7.9%, which is equivalent to 105 people, show a high level of commitment to face the problems of their neighborhood. Most of the responses are in the low and middle ranges, which indicates a very low level of commitment and leadership to deal with situations that arise in the place of residence.

594 people, corresponding to 44.5% of the study participants, would not be willing to organize to do positive things for their community and do not assume leadership roles in their group, nor do they have high levels of political participation to transform reality. Regarding community participation, understood as the commitment to face the problems of the community or place of residence, it could be established that, as with empowerment, most of the participants (79%) demonstrate a low level of participation on

issues that are socially and politically crucial to community dynamics. Only 4.5% of the social actors in this study would be willing to have high participation quotas. Table 3 summarizes the results of the dimensions of empowerment and community participation.

**Table 3.** *Psychological empowerment and community participation*

Categories	Psychological empowerment		Community participation	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Low	594	44,5%	1054	79%
Medium	635	47,6%	220	16.5%
High	105	7,9%	60	4.5%
Total	1334	100%	1334	100%
Media	<b>1,63</b>		<b>1.25</b>	
Standard dev.	<b>0,624</b>		<b>0.529</b>	

Note: Own elaboration, (2020).

While comparing people who express their desire to move and those who indicate that they are pleased with the place where they live using the variables studied, statistically significant differences are found between the sense of community with a P value of 0.000 and community participation with a P value of 0.017, both data <to the value of significance 0.05.

On the other hand, according to the empowerment variable, there are no differences between people who want to move and those who do not. The data observed from a cross-comparison of the variables allows us to infer that the sense of community and participation scale has a higher score among those who do not want to change their place of residence.

Relating the positive and negative reasons for moving to a place of residence with the variables sense of community and empowerment, significant differences were found with P values of 0.002 and 0.020 respectively <0.05. But there are no differences between negative and positive motives in the dimension of participation with a P value of 0.082> to 0.05.

Likewise, higher levels of sense of community and empowerment were found, according to the cross-comparison tables, in people who have positive reasons for moving to another place of residence. Moving on to the differences in sense of community, empowerment and community participation between men and women, framed by having an express desire to move, statistical tests were carried out using the Mann-Whitney U statistic, given the distribution of non-normality in each one of the scales applied in this research. These results are expressed below.

Regarding the variable “sense of community”, the P value obtained was 0.032, <than the significance value 0.05. In accordance with this, the hypothesis test allows us to record differences between men and women.

In the empowerment dimension, the P value found with the hypothesis test used is equal to 0.000, <than 0.05. Here too there is a difference between men and women. Finally, in the community participation dimension, the statistical test highlights a P value of 0.000. Likewise, differences are observed in this variable between men and women. (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Mann-Whitney U test to establish differences by sex.

Null hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
The distribution of pooled sense of community is the same across the sex categories	Mann-Whitney U test for independent samples	,032	Reject null hypothesis
The pooled empowerment psychological distribution is the same across the sex categories.	Mann-Whitney U test for independent samples	,000	Reject null hypothesis
The pooled community participation distribution is the same across the sex categories	Mann-Whitney U test for independent samples	,001	Reject null hypothesis

Note: Own elaboration, (2020).

Although it is true that this statistical test does not allow us to register if the differences between sense of community, empowerment and participation favor men or women, the analysis of the contingency tables highlights the direction of these differences. Thus, a higher frequency is observed in the Sense of Community category in the range defined as high in men and a lower frequency in the low and middle ranges.

In other words, in this study, although it has already been established that the sense of community is low in those who want to move to another place of residence, men have a greater sense of community when compared to women.

Regarding psychological empowerment, 10.9% of men, corresponding to 65 people, score high in this aspect, compared to 5.4% in women. Finally, in community participation, the following data are presented: 38 men, corresponding to 6.4%, obtain a high participation, which is somewhat higher compared to the group of 22 women, that score 3%, while the frequency of low participation in men is 447 people and 607 women report low community participation.

According to these results, sense of community, psychological empowerment and community participation of men are certainly greater than women. Table 5 shows the results obtained regarding the differences between men and women.

**Table 5.** Cross table sense of community, empowerment psychological y community participation by sex

Variable		Sense of community			Psychological Empowerment			Community participation		
Rank	Parámetro	Sex		Total	Sex		Total	Sex		Total
		Male	Female		Male	Female		Male	Female	
Low	Frequency	325	442	767	235	359	594	447	607	1054
		54,6%	59,8%	57,5%	39,5%	48,6%	44,5%	75,1%	82,1%	79,0%
Me- dium	Frequency	229	264	493	295	340	635	110	110	220
		38,5%	35,7%	37,0%	49,6%	46,0%	47,6%	18,5%	14,9%	16,5%
High	Frequency	41	33	74	65	40	105	38	22	60
		6,9%	4,5%	5,5%	10,9%	5,4%	7,9%	6,4%	3,0%	4,5%
Total	Frequency	595	739	1334	595	739	1334	595	739	1334
		100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100%	100%	100	100%	100%	100

Note: Own elaboration, (2020).

Likewise, comparisons by socioeconomic stratum were established in each of the fundamental variables of this research. For this, one of the criteria offered by the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE, 2015) was used: low-low, low, medium-low, medium, medium-high, and high stratum.

When working with the Kruskal-Wallis test, the results initially show the existence of statistically significant differences in the variables sense of community and empowerment in the midst of the various socioeconomic strata. No differences are observed between the various social classes and community participation.

However, performing post hoc tests, differences are only found in the sense of community between the middle and lower strata and in the variable psychological empowerment between the low and high and low and middle strata. In the other strata there are no major differences.

On the other hand, through the Mann Whitney test it was possible to establish significant differences between the variables sense of community and community participation among those who live in their own or rented houses, registering P values of 0.000 and 0.024 respectively.

The cross-comparison tables show a greater sense of community and participation in people who live in their own houses or apartments. No differences were found in the empowerment variable (Table 6).

**Table 6.** Cross table sense of community, empowerment psychological y community participation by owned or rented home

Variable		Sense of community			Empowerment psychological			Community participation		
Rank	Parameter	Type of home		Total	Type of home		Total	Type of home		Total
		Owned	Rented		Owned	Rented		Owned	Rented	
Low	Frequency	411	356	<b>767</b>	337	257	<b>594</b>	598	456	<b>1054</b>
		52.8%	64.0%	<b>57.5%</b>	43.3%	46.2%	<b>44.5%</b>	76.9%	82.0%	<b>79.0%</b>
Medium	Frequency	316	177	<b>493</b>	372	263	<b>635</b>	142	78	<b>220</b>
		40.6%	31.8%	<b>37.0%</b>	47.8%	47.3%	<b>47.6%</b>	18.3%	14.0%	<b>16.5%</b>
High	Frequency	51	23	<b>74</b>	69	36	<b>105</b>	38	22	<b>60</b>
		6.6%	4.1%	<b>5.5%</b>	8.9%	6.5%	<b>7.9%</b>	4.9%	4.0%	<b>4.5%</b>
Total	Frequency	<b>778</b>	<b>556</b>	<b>1334</b>	<b>778</b>	<b>556</b>	<b>1334</b>	<b>778</b>	<b>556</b>	<b>1334</b>
		<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

  

Tests statistics		Sense of community	Empowerment psychological	Community participation
U de Mann-Whitney		191178,500	207619,500	205224,000
Sig. Asintotic (bilateral)		,000	,163	,024

Note: Own elaboration, (2020).

Comparisons were also made between sense of community, empowerment, participation, and the life satisfaction dimension. When applying the Kruskal Wallis test, differences were found between sense of community and satisfaction with life and between empowerment and satisfaction with life. Not so between participation and satisfaction with life.

When conducting the Post Hoc tests, the differences about the variable sense of community stand out between those people Not at all satisfied and very satisfied and between people Somewhat satisfied and very satisfied.

On the other hand, the analysis of the empowerment variable registers significant differences between people who have a Somewhat satisfied response level and those with a Satisfied one; between Somewhat satisfied and very satisfied people and between the Satisfied and Very satisfied (Table 7).

**Table 7.** Variable hypothesis test: satisfaction with life and political conviction

Hypothesis testing: satisfaction with life	Sense of community	Empowerment psychological	Community participation
The distribution of the variable is the same between the categories of satisfaction with life	<b>Reject Null hypothesis</b>	<b>Reject Null hypothesis</b>	<b>Retain Null hypothesis</b>
Sig. Asintotic (bilateral)	,000	,000	,296
Hypothesis testing: political conviction	Sense of community	Empowerment psychological	Community participation
The distribution of the variable is the same between the categories of political conviction	<b>Reject Null hypothesis</b>	<b>Reject Null hypothesis</b>	<b>Retain Null hypothesis</b>
Sig. asintótica(bilateral)	,066	,017	,127

Note: Own elaboration, (2020).

The study was also interested in establishing to what extent the variables sense of community, empowerment, and participation present differences with respect to the political conviction of people. Political positions and convictions are grouped into the following categories extremely left, left, moderately left, somewhat left, neither left nor right, somewhat right, moderately right, right, extremely right.

The results allow establishing that there are no differences between the sense of community and political convictions, with a p value of 0.066,> than the significance value 0.05 and between community participation and such convictions, with a P value of 0.127> than 0.05. But differences were found between psychological empowerment and political positions, with a P value of 0.017 <a 0.05 (Table 7).

Finally, correlations between the three scales used in this research were made: sense of community, empowerment, and community participation. The results allow us to establish that the correlation between sense of community and empowerment is 0.210; between sense of community and participation the result corresponds to 0.349 and between empowerment and participation the outcome was 0.297. What is collated from these results is the existence of levels of positive but weak correlation between these scales (see Table 5).



## **Discussion**

El presente estudio buscó conocer los niveles de sentido de comunidad y de empoderamiento y de participación comunitaria entre aquellas personas que han manifestado abiertamente su deseo de cambiar de lugar de residencia en un barrio de Barranquilla, Colombia. Se encontró que el 34,90% de las 1334 personas participantes en el estudio quiere mudarse por razones positivas como su desarrollo familiar o personal. Pero también hay razones negativas entre las personas del estudio relacionadas con la inseguridad (10,7%), la contaminación ambiental (2,5%), la vecindad inadecuada (4,6%) o problemas con la infraestructura de la vivienda (8,8%). Sobre la primera variable abordada, se registró en términos generales un bajo sentido de comunidad (57,5%), sin embargo, 549 (11,6%) de los participantes en el estudio considera que esta categoría del estudio es importante o muy importante.

En cuanto a las otras dos variables estudiadas se encontró que el 44,5% de los participantes tiene un bajo empoderamiento comunitario (y el 47,6% presenta un nivel medio de empoderamiento comunitario), lo que significa bajos niveles de compromiso y liderazgo y liderazgo para hacerse cargo de las situaciones que ocurren en el espacio donde viven, y este porcentaje aumenta a 79% (bajo nivel) para la participación comunitaria (más 16,5% que presenta un nivel medio de participación comunitaria, lo que indica que se presentaron bajos niveles de compromiso para tener un papel clave en la solución de los problemas que aquejan a la comunidad. Además, las correlaciones encontradas en el estudio, aunque positivas, fueron débiles y los resultados alcanzaron solo 0,349.

Estos datos se contradicen con lo planteado por Ramos Vidal y Maya Jariego (2014) en el estudio realizado con 120 trabajadores de Andalucía, quienes afirman que estas tres categorías se relacionan positivamente y se potencian mutuamente en un círculo virtuoso que genera beneficios para la comunidad y las personas. De acuerdo con esta relación, cuando la comunidad tiene un nivel de empoderamiento medio a bajo como los resultados encontrados en el presente estudio, su participación comunitaria, liderazgo y compromiso para enfrentar los problemas también son bajos, por lo que tienden a formar un círculo vicioso que los lleva a no hacerse cargo de las situaciones por resolver en su comunidad.

In another study carried out by Ramos Vidal (2014) and which he titled: "The experience of multiple", it was found that sense of community increases due to the emotional connection between people in each context. This leads to the conclusion that when analyzing the construction of the sense of community, it is necessary to examine the joint influence of both the assessment of the physical context and the internal relationships between the members of a reference community. If people are emotionally disconnected from the place where they reside due to problems associated with context such as insecurity, lack of infrastructure, among others, it is not difficult that the levels of sense of community, participation and empowerment are low as found in the results of this study.

Other studies have been interested in relating empowerment to community participation. This is the case of an investigation developed by Speer (2000b), which shows evidence that people with high levels of intrapersonal empowerment also reported having participated in community activities more frequently than people with low levels of intrapersonal empowerment.

Likewise, and confirming the relationship between low levels of empowerment (92.1%) and low levels of community participation (79%), the study by Speer (2000b) was found where it is evident that people with high levels of intrapersonal empowerment also reported having participated in community activities more frequently than people with low levels of intrapersonal empowerment. In the same sense, the study

carried out in Peru was found, with a sample of 150 participants from marginal neighborhoods in the cities of Lima, Cueto, Espinosa, Guillén and Seminario (2016), where the relationship between the sense of community and the subjective, psychological and social expressions of well-being was explored and significant relationships were found between the factors of the sense of community and various aspects of family and community well-being.

The length of residence in a community también was directly associated with high levels of sense of community, which influences social well-being and this, in turn, psychological well-being. Social well-being is impacted by psychological well-being, while the cognitive aspect of subjective well-being strengthens, in turn, the sense of community.

However, it has been found that, although the members of a community identify with it and establish emotional ties among themselves, the above would not necessarily lead to the emergence of collective actions aimed at the search for the common good, nor would it ensure the perception of interdependence between those who live in the same space as demonstrated by some studies (Balbuena, 2012; Távara, 2012; Escalera Reyes, 2020).

From these findings it is interpreted that, although levels of identification and even emotional bond with the neighborhood and the community where one lives can be reported, this does not guarantee the implementation of specific activities to solve the problems that the community may have. This means that the participants of the present study, who mostly claimed to have low levels of participation and empowerment, will not be interested in doing something about the place where they live to improve their living conditions. and solve associated problems (such as insecurity, garbage management, transportation deficit, lack of civic culture, among others).

Which could be explained with previous adverse social conditions, as well as with a shared memory of difficulties and failures in the search to positively impact their individual and/or community living conditions (Balbuena, 2013; Escalera Reyes, 2020). It would then be the positive emotions generated in social interaction that would be associated with the construction of the group and with the emotional identification with the group and not with the satisfaction of needs derived from belonging to the group (Alexander et al., 2021). To the extent that residents feel part of a group that provides them with emotional and identity support, their perception of group well-being will be enhanced at various levels. Finally, these results pose a challenge for community interventions, since they direct collective actions not towards obtaining material resources and visible achievements, but towards strengthening inter- and intrapersonal ties and towards promoting satisfactory life experiences within the community.

In contrast to what was found in this study, in a research carried out by Seminario Obando (2014) that aimed at analyzing the relationship between sense of community, community participation and values in a group of community leaders living in socially vulnerable contexts in the cities of Lima and Callao, in which 78 people from 15 human settlements participated, it was possible to establish significant relationships between the dimensions of the Community Sense Index (membership / belonging, emotional connection, influence and satisfaction of needs) and the beliefs, practices and involvement of the leaders and community participation rates. This allows us to conclude that there are differential levels to the variables analyzed among those study participants whose distinctive feature is the motivation to change their place of residence.

The sense of community is presented as a variable without major relationships with the place of origin, type of dwelling (house or apartment), one being part of a residential complex, one owning the house

where one lives or living in a rented house, age, sex and level of education. However, there are some differences that it would be important to explore in other studies, between sense of community and the socioeconomic stratum and the different levels of the variable satisfaction with life.

For example, Hombrados Mendieta and López Espigares (2014) conducted a study to analyze which dimensions of the sense of community most positively influence the quality of residential life and establish which dimensions better predict the quality of life of residents who live in neighborhoods with different socioeconomic positions. The study was carried out in the ten districts of the city of Malaga, Spain, with a total sample of 1,583 people.

Results showed that satisfaction with the physical environment of the neighborhood, motivation and social support provided by the institutions are three of the dimensions of the sense of community that best predict the quality of residential life.

Findings also indicate that the components of the sense of community that predict the quality of residential life vary according to the socioeconomic position of the neighbors, which confirms the findings of the present study: there are significant differences in the sense of community that people have according to the socioeconomic stratum and the different levels of satisfaction with life. On the other hand, Vallejo-Martín et al. (2017), carried out an investigation that analyzes the relationship between sense of community, fatalism, and participation in a context of socioeconomic crisis, where two types of participation were distinguished: community and socio-political. The study was carried out with a sample of 759 people.

Results showed medium levels of sense of community, medium-low of fatalism and low of the two types of participation. Regression analysis indicated that sense of community and fatalism are predictive factors for participatory behavior. Therefore, feeling part of a community leads to participating in it, either through community behaviors or behaviors that pursue social change. But the belief that the future is already written inhibits both types of participation. This will also be influenced by the perception of the socioeconomic status to which one belongs.

## **Conclusions**

There are several reasons that lead people to change their place of residence: among them there are positive and negative ones. The most important positive reasons refer to improving the own living conditions and the negative ones to inadequate conditions of the place of residence. In general terms, the people in the study who intend to move to a new place of residence have a low sense of community and community participation. As for psychological empowerment, this is at a medium and low level.

Despite this low level in these three fundamental categories, it could be established that, by making comparisons between women and men, men tend to have higher levels of sense of community, empowerment, and participation than women. Regarding the comparisons by socioeconomic stratum, some differences were evidenced in the sense of community between the middle and low strata in favor of the latter. Similarly, differences in the empowerment variable stand out, but only between the low and middle strata and the low-middle and high strata, in favor of the low and low-middle strata. In other words, there are higher levels of sense of community and empowerment in the lower strata. When comparing the sense of community, empowerment and participation of people who live in their own houses or apartments and the sense of community, empowerment, and participation of those who live in rental, there are clearly significant differences in favor of those who live in their own places.

Comparing the sense of community with the responses obtained with the life satisfaction scale, differences were found between those not very satisfied and the very satisfied and between the somewhat satisfied and the very satisfied people. Similarly, differences are observed in the empowerment and life satisfaction scale. However, there are no differences between life satisfaction and community participation.

No differences were found between political conviction and the values obtained in the sense of community, empowerment, and community participation scales. That is, according to the answers obtained in this study, there is no relationship between one being from the left or from the right to score high or low in the fundamental categories addressed in this research.

Finally, although the preponderant scores obtained with the variables sense of community, empowerment and community participation were low and medium, the correlation analysis establishes a weak positive correlation. In the future, it is suggested to develop longitudinal studies that allow the results to be compared with the answers given by those people who say they are comfortable with the place where they live and have not thought about moving from their home or neighborhood.

In any case, the variables considered here constitute an expeditious way to establish the relationship between people's psychological sense and the socio-cultural context in which they live, and these can be reciprocally constructed.

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